

Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society

<http://journals.cambridge.org/JRA>

Additional services for *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*:

Email alerts: [Click here](#)

Subscriptions: [Click here](#)

Commercial reprints: [Click here](#)

Terms of use : [Click here](#)



The Problems of Qūmis

John Hansman

Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society / Volume 100 / Issue 02 / April 1968, pp 111 - 139

DOI: 10.1017/S0035869X00126590, Published online: 15 March 2011

Link to this article: http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0035869X00126590

How to cite this article:

John Hansman (1968). The Problems of Qūmis. Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, 100, pp 111-139 doi:10.1017/S0035869X00126590

Request Permissions : [Click here](#)

THE PROBLEMS OF QŪMIS

By JOHN HANSMAN

I. THE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

DURING THE SUMMER OF 330 B.C. Alexander the Great pursued the Persian king Darius III through Northern Media, past the Caspian Gates, and eastward into the Achaemenid satrapy of Parthava (Parthia). Upon reaching Darius, Alexander found the king murdered by the usurper Bessus. The Macedonian thereafter advanced east for three more days until he arrived at the wealthy city which was later to be called Hecatompylos.¹ It is the problems of Hecatompylos and the several related questions of its home district, called Comisene by the Greeks, which this paper will consider.²

Alexander rested his army for three days at Hecatompylos while necessary provisions were brought in from the surrounding countryside. During this period of idle waiting, welcome rumours spread among the soldiery that Alexander, having conquered the Persian homeland, would now return to Macedonia. Hearing of such gossip, Alexander chose to address his troops. The commander announced that it was his wish to press on to India so that the task of subduing the whole of the Achaemenid empire could be completed. The troops, though weary, responded favourably and offered to follow Alexander anywhere.³ Thus a firm decision was made at Hecatompylos to continue the campaign in the East.

With the East duly conquered, Alexander returned to Babylon and died shortly thereafter. The empire was now divided among the leader's political heirs. By 316 B.C. one of these successors, the Macedonian general Antigonus (Cyclops), had gained control of the eastern territories. Between 311 and 302 B.C., however, Seleucus (Nicator) seized most of these satrapies including Parthia. We are told by Appian that it was this Seleucus who founded Hecatompylos in Parthyene.⁴ But what is most probably meant here is that Seleucus gave a Greek appellation, Hecatompylos ("Hundred-Gated City"), to a Persian city which was already in existence at the time of Alexander's visit. It would seem that the later Alexander historians merely applied the Greek name to earlier mentions of the town. A parallel example of this practice of Seleucus is his naming the neighbouring city of Rhagae (Ray) Europus.⁵ The now lost Iranian name for Hecatompylos is considered in section VI of this paper.

For over 50 years Seleucus and his successors maintained authority in the eastern provinces. But about 245 B.C., with Seleucus II fully occupied in the third Syrian war, a revolt occurred in the satrapy of Parthyene. This was followed c. 239 B.C. by a revolt of Diodotus, satrap of Bactria, who thereafter took the title of king. Finally Arsaces, chief

¹ Diodorus Siculus, XVII, 75.

² The writer wishes to thank Dr. M. Boyce for advice on Old and Middle Persian word forms and Dr. A. D. H. Bivar for reading the manuscript and for several useful suggestions.

³ Quintus Curtius, VI, 2-4.

⁴ Appian, *Syriaca*, 57.

⁵ Pliny, XI, 13, 6.

of the nomadic tribe of the Parni, seized Parthia some time between 247 and 238 B.C.⁶ The fountain-head of the later Parthian empire was thus established.⁷

Continuing political pressures elsewhere prevented Seleucus II from taking effective measures against the Parnic rebellion (or invasion). Arsaces and his successor Tiridates I used these quiet years to develop the Parthian army, build fortresses, and strengthen the defences of their towns. During this time Tiridates founded the city of Dara in a fertile, valley-like fastness of land.⁸ Dara may have served as the Arsacid capital of the period, but its seemingly remote, mountainous location would rather suggest a sort of royal cantonment to be used in the event of outside invasion. The more probable first capital of Parthia, as suggested by Masson and others, was perhaps (old) Nisa, where a lavishly decorated Parthian palace and temple complex has been excavated by Soviet archaeologists.⁹ Nisa lies just north-east of the present Iranian border below the Kopet Dagh mountains at the edge of the Kara-Kum desert in Soviet Turkmenistan. The main construction phase of the Nisa palace is dated from the third century B.C. to the first quarter of the second century B.C.¹⁰

Shortly after Tiridates' death, c. 211 B.C., the Seleucid Antiochus III undertook a military campaign to regain the lost eastern provinces. Antiochus advanced to the then Parthian city of Hecatompylos with little opposition. The city surrendered to the invading Greeks, c. 209 B.C., without a fight. The Parthian army had apparently abandoned the place for a more favourable stand in the mountains to the north.¹¹

Later classical writers always identify Hecatompylos as a royal city of the Parthians. But when did it become a royal residence or capital? It is curious that Polybius, our only detailed source for the Parthian campaign of Antiochus, makes no reference to a royal palace at that place. Frye suggests that the Arsacid capital was established in Hecatompylos before the Seleucid incursion there.¹² If this were so, the city, at that time at least, must have been more a temporary, alternate royal seat to Nisa. It would certainly not seem prudent for the Arsacids, known to be greatly concerned with their own defences, to establish a main capital so far to the west and out of the protecting mountains of their more northerly homeland. Indeed, such a move would appear highly improbable during a period when invasion by the Seleucids could be expected at any time, and at a site which, when invasion did come, proved so indefensible that it was abandoned without a fight.

Although Antiochus later advanced into the rebellious provinces of Bactria and India, we do not know the final outcome of the conflict with the Parni-Parthians. Polybius takes us no farther into this phase of the campaign than Hyrcania (Gurgan), and Hyrcania may

⁶ For a more detailed consideration of these dates and sequence of events see J. Wolski, "The decay of the Iranian empire of the Seleucids and the chronology of the Parthian beginnings", *Berytus*, XII, 35 ff.

⁷ It should be noted that the original inhabitants of the Achaemenid satrapy of Parthava (the later Seleucid Parthyene) were not Arsacid Parthians. The tribe of the Parni, under the leadership of Arsaces (Parthian Arshak), would have become identified with the Parthians only after gaining control of the satrapy of that name.

⁸ Justin, XLI, 5.

⁹ On Soviet excavations at Old Nisa see G. A. Pugachenkova, "Arkhiturnye pamyatnik Nicy", *Trudy Yuzhno-Turkmenistanskoi Arkh. Ekspeditsii*, I, Ashkabad, 1949, 201 ff. See also G. Vmoraya, "Parfyanskoe zodchestvo", ib., VI, Moscow, 1958, 66 ff.

¹⁰ M. Masson, "Nekotorye novye dannye po istorii Parfii", *Vestnik Drevnej Istorii*, 33, 1950, Part 3, 43.

¹¹ Polybius, X, 28-30.

¹² R. Frye, *The heritage of Persia*, New York, 1963, 266, n. 23.

well be as far as the invaders got in that area.¹³ The Arsacids were certainly not conquered. We know from Justin that the Parthians were eventually taken into alliance by Antiochus.¹⁴ Frye suggests that such an alliance may have lasted until Antiochus suffered defeat by the Romans in 189 B.C.¹⁵

Shortly after peace with the Seleucids had been concluded, Hecatompylos and the greater area of Parthyene were probably returned to Arsacid control. The development of Hecatompylos as a major Parthian royal residence would seem to date from this period—the final decade of the 3rd century B.C. With the Seleucids now serving as allies in the west, there would, indeed, be far less danger of a renewed military invasion from that source.

Our earliest surviving reference to Hecatompylos as a Parthian royal city is given by Strabo, who quotes a now lost work of Apollodorus of Artemita.¹⁶ Apollodorus lived in the Parthian territories during the late 2nd century B.C.¹⁷ But how long then did Hecatompylos remain an Arsacid capital? According to Strabo's own words, in his time (the end of the 1st century B.C.) the Parthian winter capital was located at Ctesiphon and the summer capital at Ecbatana (modern Hamadan) in Media.¹⁸ To understand when this move to the west occurred we must consider the developing political situation.

After the war with Antiochus III, surviving histories give no indication of renewed Parthian military activity for nearly 40 years. During the reign of Phraates I (c. 176–171 B.C.), however, the Arsacids invaded the mountainous country lying south of the Caspian Sea. Evidence suggests that Phraates' successor, the able Mithradates I, continued to expand the Parthian domains. Quite probably as a result of these incursions, Antiochus IV organized a campaign in the summer of 166 B.C. to recapture the old Seleucid territories of the east. Antiochus' attempt proved unsuccessful and he died during the retreat.

Mithradates was now left free to continue the Parthian expansion; Media fell to him in or soon after 145 B.C. and Seleucia on the Tigris, the capital of Babylonia, in 141 B.C.¹⁹

Tarn suggests that the Arsacid capital was removed from Hecatompylos (i.e. to Ctesiphon) following Mithradates' successful invasion of Babylonia.²⁰ It is probable that a Parthian royal residence was established at Ctesiphon at this time. But it is hardly likely that the main Arsacid capital—if, indeed, such a first seat of government did exist at this early stage of empire—would have been advanced so far west so soon. Already in 140 or 139 B.C. Mithradates was involved in a war with the Seleucid king Demetrius II, and shortly after winning this conflict Mithradates died.

Phraates II, who succeeded his father in Parthia, continued to hold Babylonia until about 130 B.C. He would, of course, have spent some time during this period at Ctesiphon. As Strabo confirms, however, Ctesiphon served as a Parthian winter capital. It is unlikely

¹³ Polybius, X, 31.

¹⁴ Justin, XLI, 5.

¹⁵ Frye, *op. cit.*, 173.

¹⁶ Strabo, *Geography*, 11.IX.1.

¹⁷ On the dating of Apollodorus see Wolski, *op. cit.*, 43, and W. Tarn, *The Greeks in Bactria and India*, Cambridge, 1958, 44.

¹⁸ Strabo, *Geography*, 11.XIII.1, 16.I.16.

¹⁹ For this sequence of events see N. Debevoise, *A political history of Parthia*, Chicago, 1938, 18–23; to be modified in the light of the Heracles inscription from Bisitun (cf. L. Robert, *Gnomon*, 1963, 70), dated S.E. 164, which presumably predates the Parthian conquest of Media.

²⁰ Tarn, *op. cit.*, 13.

that Phraates would have remained there during the hot summer months. The Arsacids, it will be remembered, were of an essentially nomadic heritage. The reigns, at least of these earlier kings, probably consisted of a series of royal progressions from city to city. The early Arsacids were no more a settled dynasty than were the Achaemenids with their several seasonal palaces at Susa, Persepolis, and Hamadan/Ecbatana. Parallel traditions of the Parthian era are, indeed, known.

Nisa, for example, seems to have been a favourite residence of Mithradates II, the heir of Phraates. Evidence suggests that this king renamed Nisa Mithradatkirt after himself.²¹ A century later, Isidore noted that royal tombs were located near Nisa.²² Soviet excavations have shown that the palace of Nisa was repaired continuously and apparently occupied until the final downfall of the Parthians in the 3rd century A.D.²³ Thus this city may always have remained a dynastic centre of the Arsacid house, though the political capital was where the king resided.

Another important Parthian residence, according to Polybius, was at Tambrax in Hyrcania.²⁴ Strabo states that the Parthian rulers were wont to spend part of their summers in Hyrcania.²⁵ Phraates II no doubt followed this practice. The kings possibly resided at Tambrax. They may also have stayed at the nearby walled city of Sirynx, which was considered to be the Hyrcanian capital.

Serious political disorders kept the second Phraates frequently in the east. When the Saka nomadic hordes intruded into eastern Parthia in 129 B.C., Phraates advanced to meet the invaders. A certain Himerus was left as vice-regent in Babylonia. In 128 B.C. Phraates died while opposing the Saka, as did his successor Artabanus II in 123 B.C. By 127 B.C., meanwhile, Himerus, who had declared himself independent of the Arsacids, was defeated by Hyspaosines, the former Seleucid eparch of Mesene in Southern Mesopotamia. Not until 123 B.C. did the usurper Himerus regain control of central Babylonia. Mithradates II finally reconquered all of Babylonia in 121/120 B.C.²⁶ During these eight years, between 129 and 121 B.C., then, it would seem obvious that the Parthian winter residence could not have been located at Ctesiphon.

If, indeed, the Arsacid rulers of this troubled period were to take up winter quarters at all, they would probably have stayed at Hecatompylos. Located in the plainlands south of the Elburz range, the area of Hecatompylos would have offered a far milder cold-season

²¹ The name Mithradatkirt is attested on an ostrakon found at Old Nisa (see I. Dyakonov and V. Livshits, *Dokumenty iz Nisy*, Moscow, 1960, 22, n. 9). Frye, op. cit., 174, suggests that Nisa may always have been called Mithradatkirt by the Parthians or that the name was given to the city by Mithradates I. But on the coinage of Phraates II, son and successor of Mithradates I, we find NISA and NISAK represented as an apparent mint-place. It is hardly likely that Phraates would so completely have ignored a new name given to Nisa by his famous father. On the other hand, the letters MI or M alone, which could represent Mithradatkirt, are the most common monograms found on the bronze coinage of Mithradates II. W. Wroth (*Catalogue of the coins of Parthia*, 1903, lxxxiii) notes that the monogram MI would suggest a town named after Mithradates II, but the evidence of the ostrakon was not then available. No form of the word Nisa, as such, appears on any of the second Mithradates' striking. Thus it would seem that Mithradates II, rather than Mithradates I, might be credited with the Mithradatkirt appellation.

²² Isidore of Charax, *Parthian stations* (ed. Schoff), Philadelphia, 1914, 9.

²³ Cf. A. Mongait, *Archaeology in the U.S.S.R.*, Moscow, 1959, 296-7.

²⁴ Polybius, X, 31.

²⁵ Strabo, 16.I.16.

²⁶ Cf. Debevoise, op. cit., 34-40, for sources on the Saka invasion and on Himerus.

climate than Nisa, which lies exposed to the harsh winter temperatures of the Central Asian steppes. Summer on the Damghan plain, on the other hand, would have been as uncomfortably hot as it is today, and as are the summer months at Ctesiphon; hence Strabo's note of the later Arsacids spending their summers in (the cooler altitudes of) Ecbatana and Hyrcania. Hecatompylos, then, like Ctesiphon which eventually replaced this older city, was essentially an Arsacid winter capital. Exactly when Ctesiphon superseded Hecatompylos as a preferred royal residence is not indicated by our sources. The change was no doubt a gradual one and certainly could not have begun until after Mithradates II retook Babylonia in 121/120 B.C. As we have earlier noted, Apollodorus still calls Hecatompylos a royal seat of the Parthians in the late 2nd century B.C. The progressive abandonment of this location, therefore, must have occurred some time during the later reign of Mithradates II (c. 123–87 B.C.) or that of his immediate successor. There may, of course, have been factional disputes within the ruling family which prevented Ctesiphon from being used by contending Arsacids for certain periods after this date. But we are here concerned with general trends.

It is true that Pliny (late 1st century A.D.) calls the older Arsacid residence "Parthiae caput Hecatompylos"²⁷ and Ptolemy (middle 2nd century A.D.) gives the title "Hecatompylon Regina".²⁸ However, as with Strabo who quoted the much earlier Apollodorus for a similar identification, so these later classical writers also must have cited earlier sources. Pliny, indeed, in another passage, refers quite specifically to Ctesiphon as the Parthian "caput regnorum".²⁹ Ptolemy, in the introduction to his *Geography*, notes the difficulty which he has had in deciding between the various conflicting statements of earlier geographers.³⁰ All other surviving contemporary sources consistently give Ctesiphon as the Parthian capital from the 1st century B.C. onwards.³¹

We have earlier noted that Hecatompylos was located within the old Achaemenid satrapy of Parthava (Parthia), three days' march from the borders of mountainous Hyrcania. During the Seleucid period the large, unwieldy Persian satrapies were divided into smaller, more closely manageable administrative districts called eparchies, the names of which almost always took the Greek ending—*νη*.³² That Hecatompylos was situated in the eparchy of Comisene has long been understood. We are told by Isidore of Charax that in travelling eastward from the Caspian Gates on the trans-Asiatic *Khurāsān* route one came first to Choarene (modern Khavār). The road then passed through Comisene (variant Comisena) into Hyrcania.³³ In this regard we should remember that Alexander entered

²⁷ Pliny, VI, 17.

²⁸ Ptolemy, *Geography*, VI, 30.

²⁹ Pliny, VI, 30.

³⁰ Ptolemy (*Geography*, I, 5) states that parts of the earth are different today from what they were, either on account of revolution or from transformation, in which process they are known to have partially fallen into ruin. He notes, in this regard, that he has had to decide for himself what is credible and what is not.

³¹ Tacitus (*Annals*, VI, 26) calls Ctesiphon "sedes imperii"; Dio Cassius (*Hist. Rom.*, XL, 45) gives *πόλις ἐν ᾗ βασιλεία [οἱ πάθοι] ἔχουσι* and Ammianus (XXIII, 6), "*Persidis specimen summum*". It is, of course, known that Vologases I (A.D. 51–80) founded the city of Vologasia near Babylon (cf. Pliny, VI, 122). But if Vologasia was the Parthian capital of that reign, Vologases' successors certainly returned the government to Ctesiphon. Cf. Debevoise, *op. cit.*, 204–5.

³² On the Seleucid eparchies see Tarn, *op. cit.*, 2–3.

³³ Isidore of Charax, *op. cit.*, 7.

Hyrkania directly from the district of Hecatompylos (Quintus Curtius, VI, 10). Ptolemy confirms the location of Comisene as lying immediately below Hyrkania and before the more westerly district of Choarene.³⁴ Isidore, writing at the end of the 1st century B.C., states that there were eight villages in Comisene but no city.³⁵ He does not mention Hecatompylos. Thus we have a further indication of the abandonment of Parthian Hecatompylos as a major city-site after the removal of the Arsacid winter capital to Ctesiphon.

The local eparchal name of Comisene survived into the Sasanian period as Kōmish and into the Islamic era as the arabicized Qūmis.³⁶ Ninth- and 10th-century Islamic geographers place the cities of Bistam (modern Bustam), Damghan, and Semnan within the Qūmis political district.³⁷ The medieval town and district of Khuwār (Khavār, ancient Choarene) were located to the west of Semnan (fig. 1).

II. THE SEARCH FOR HECATOMPYLOS

The site of Hecatompylos has never been found although it has been sought for well over a hundred years. Many locations have been proposed. Wilson (1841) suggests Jajarm; Ferrier (1856) the Bustam-Shahrud area; while Houtum-Schindler favoured some mounds called Tepe Surkh situated 16 miles (25.6 km.) south of Damghan.³⁸ Jackson (1911) suggested that the actual Hecatompylos was to be found in a congeries of ruined villages scattered between Damghan and the town of Frāt located 14 miles (22.4 km.) directly to the south (fig. 1).³⁹ All these identifications, however, lack supporting archaeological evidence and none have gained general acceptance by modern scholars. The city of Damghan, a site favoured by Herzfeld, has also proved unacceptable.⁴⁰ *Sondages* were carried out by Schmidt in the court of Damghan's oldest mosque, the 9th-century Tāri(kh) Khāne, and at the town's citadel between 1931 and 1932. These efforts produced only Islamic material. The results led the expedition to conclude that "no pre-Islamic remains of consequence, certainly not Hecatompylos, are below the present town of Damghan".⁴¹ Test trenches at three other sites in the vicinity of Damghan proved equally negative. An extensive aerial reconnaissance was undertaken by Schmidt in his search for the site. But the whole of the Damghan plain from the Elburz Range southwards to the northern edge of the Dasht-i Lut was covered without result.⁴² Where then is Hecatompylos?

In considering the problem of our site, the writer turned to the only surviving sources which provide a measured distance to that place—Strabo and Pliny. Strabo, again quoting

³⁴ Ptolemy, VI, 5.

³⁵ Isidore of Charax, *op. cit.*, 7.

³⁶ See p. 134 below.

³⁷ Cf. Mas'ūdī, *Bibl. Geog. Arab.* (De Goeje ed.), III, Leiden, 1894, 8, 49, and Istakhri, *ib.*, I, 1, 229.

³⁸ For these locations see (in order) H. Wilson, *Ariana Antiqua*, 1841, 171; J. Ferrier, *Caravan journeys*, 1856, 69; and A. Houtum-Schindler, "Notes on some antiquities found in a mound near Damghan", *J.R. Geog. S.*, IX, 425-7.

³⁹ A. Jackson, *From Constantinople to the home of Omar Khayyam*, New York, 1911, 161 ff., 176 ff.

⁴⁰ E. Herzfeld, "Zarathustra", *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran*, Berlin, 1929-1930, 107, n. 1, follows von Ritter and Kiepert in favouring the Damghan location. An earlier consideration of the classical references to Hecatompylos is given by A. Mordtmann in "Hecatompylos", *Sb. bayer. Akad. Wiss.*, Munich, 1869, 512 ff.

⁴¹ E. Schmidt, *Excavations at Tepe Hissar Damghan*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1937, 11-17.

⁴² E. Schmidt, *Flights over ancient cities of Iran*, Chicago, 1940, 34-5.

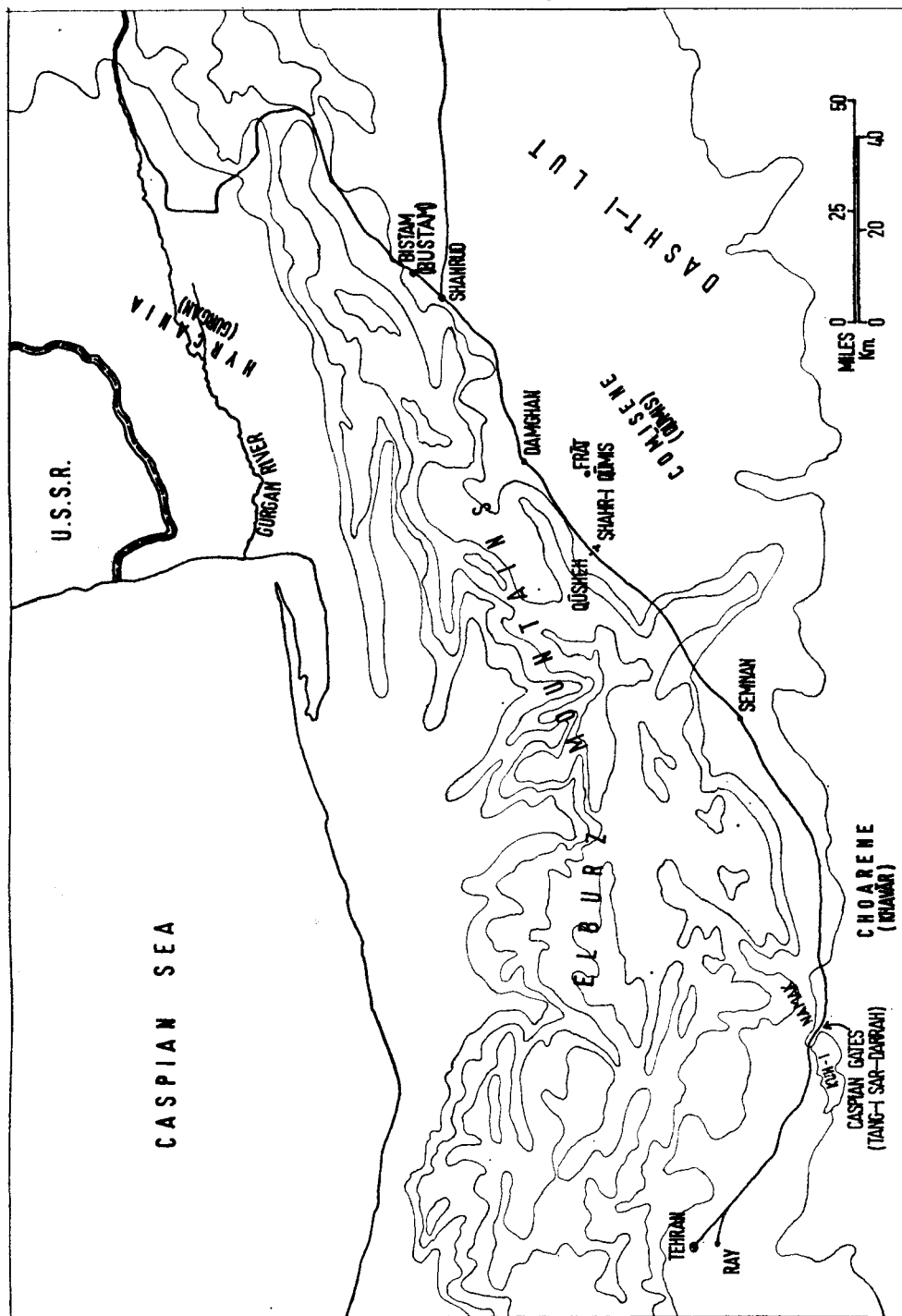


FIG. 1

the older Apollodorus of Artemita, states that Hecatompylos is situated 1260 *stades* from the Caspian Gates.⁴³ Pliny gives the same distance as 133 *milia passuum*.⁴⁴

A consensus of scholarly opinion would now seem to equate the Caspian Gates of Alexander's passage with the narrow, six-mile-long (9.7 km.) Sar-darrah valley which cuts through an isolated spur of the Elburz Mountains.⁴⁵ This spur, called Kuh-i Namak, juts south from the main Elburz range to divide the plain of Varamin from that of Khavār. The main road joining ancient Rhagae and the Damghan area passes over the Tang-i Sar-Darrah which bisects the Kuh-i Namak from east to west (fig. 1).

In the past, various attempts have been made to convert the *stade* of Strabo into modern miles or kilometres. The resulting distance could then be measured off from the Caspian Gates, eastward along the *Khurāsān* road. It was supposed that if the road here had not greatly changed since antiquity—and there is no reason to believe that it has—then such a procedure might assist in locating the site of Hecatompylos. What these efforts did produce were such places as Shahrud and Damghan, neither of which, as we have seen, bear any supporting evidence of being our site. The problem, of course, has been one of converting Strabo's *stade*.

The Greek unit, the *stade*, always contains exactly 600 Greek feet. But the Greek foot is not always of the same standard length. In classical Greece a number of different standards for the foot were in simultaneous use. The Olympic foot equalled 220.5 mm. but it may once have been longer; the Pergamene foot was 330 mm.; the Aeginetan foot 333 mm.; the Samian foot 350 mm., and the Athenian foot 295.7 mm.⁴⁶ Since much of Strabo is taken from other writers there is no assurance that we have a single standard of measurement even within the limits of his own *Geography*. But we do know that Strabo quotes Apollodorus for both the distance between Rhagae and the Caspian Gates (500 *stades*) and the distance between the Caspian Gates and Hecatompylos (1,260 *stades*);⁴⁷ so here, at least, the standard should be the same. The ancient city of Rhagae is thought to have been located slightly to the north-east of modern Ray. Thus it would seem possible to apply modern standards in measuring the distance between Rhagae and the easternmost extent of the Sar-Darrah valley (the end of the Caspian Gates pass). The distance is, in fact, approximately 51 miles (82 km.). Dividing this number by 500, we arrive at a figure of 0.102 mile (0.163 km.), which should nearly equal the length of Apollodorus' *stade*. We now multiply our new determinate by 1,260, the distance in *stades* between the Caspian Gates and Hecatompylos. Measuring the resulting figure of 128.5 miles (207 km.) from the eastern end of the Sar-Darrah pass, we come to a point some three miles (4.8 km.) north-east of Qūsbeh and 20 miles (32 km.) south-west of Damghan on the *Khurāsān* road.

The Roman mile is usually given as 8 per cent. less than the modern English mile. Thus Pliny's 133 *milia passuum* would equal approximately 122.36 English miles (197 km.).⁴⁸

⁴³ Strabo, 11.IX.1.

⁴⁴ Pliny, VI, 17.

⁴⁵ For a detailed consideration of the Caspian Gates' location see Jackson, *op. cit.*, 127–138. See also A. Stahl, "Notes on the march of Alexander the Great from Ecbatana to Hyrcania", *Geog. J.*, LXIV, Oct. 1924, 318–20.

⁴⁶ On the various lengths of the Greek *stade* or *stadium* see *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, Oxford, 1957, s.v. "Measure".

⁴⁷ Cf. n. 43 above.

⁴⁸ On the Roman mile see *OED*, s.v. "Mile".

On measuring this distance from the eastern limits of the Sar-Darraḥ defile, we arrive at a point less than three miles (4·8 km.) short of Qūsheh on the Damghan road. Pliny states that he took this measure from Diognetus and Baeton, the surveyors of Alexander.⁴⁹ We do not know what foot length the Alexandrine surveyors used here, nor what length of Greek measure Pliny adapted in converting the *stade* into Roman miles. It is therefore not surprising that Pliny's measure should fall a few miles short of Strabo or that Strabo should exceed Pliny. What did seem important, however, was that a way-stop marked Qūsheh on the maps fell almost exactly between these two determinates (fig. 1). If the present writer's theory was to be confirmed, then, quite an extensive ruin-site should be found near Qūsheh.

A search of the works of 19th- and 20th-century Western travellers in Persia produced no reference to ruins in the Qūsheh vicinity. Ferrier (1845) notes merely that "Goosheh" has a caravanserai where only black bread was available.⁵⁰ Goldsmid (1872) mentions a post-house and a very dirty caravanserai which served only bread and water.⁵¹ Jackson (1910) was even more terse; he described the place as suitable for but a moment's halt.⁵² The prospect of Qūsheh seemed very bleak indeed.

Nothing further could be done in considering the Qūsheh area until the writer himself returned to Iran in September, 1966.

III. SHAHR-I QŪMIS

On the morning of 18th November, 1966, in the company of two friends, Charles and Marian Sturzs, the writer arrived at Qūsheh. The modest road-stop proved little changed since the days of Jackson. The now long-abandoned caravansarai still stands, as does a more modern *chaikhāne* which serves refreshments to passing travellers. After a courtesy glass of tea the writer asked the *chaikhāne* attendant if any ruin-sites existed in the near vicinity. The attendant's answer, in Persian, proved significant. "Do you mean Shahr-i Qūmis (the City of Qūmis) over there?" As he spoke the bearded man gestured to a large scattering of low mounds which were barely visible in the distance, across the road to the east.

The site of Qūmis is decidedly impressive. On turning from the Damghan road at Qūsheh and proceeding directly east, one crosses a semi-arid stretch of gravel-scattered flatland. After three miles (4·8 km.) the first sighting of potsherds was made and at the same time the land surface became more uneven. This cultural zone continues for half a mile (0·8 km.) until the first high mound, locally called Naqqāre Khāne, is reached (fig. 3, Region I; pl. I). From the Naqqāre Khāne, numerous other mounds and ruined structures extend for a further distance of two and a half miles (4 km.) to the south-east (figs. 2, 3; pl. II(a)).

It was quickly confirmed that a continuous and uninterrupted scattering of potsherds was to be found throughout the extent of the Shahr-i Qūmis site. In total the former inhabited area covers approximately three miles (4·8 km.). There is a general east-west

⁴⁹ Pliny, VI, 21.

⁵⁰ Ferrier, *op. cit.*, 68.

⁵¹ F. Goldsmid, *Eastern Persia*, 1876, I, 382.

⁵² Jackson, *op. cit.*, 159-60.

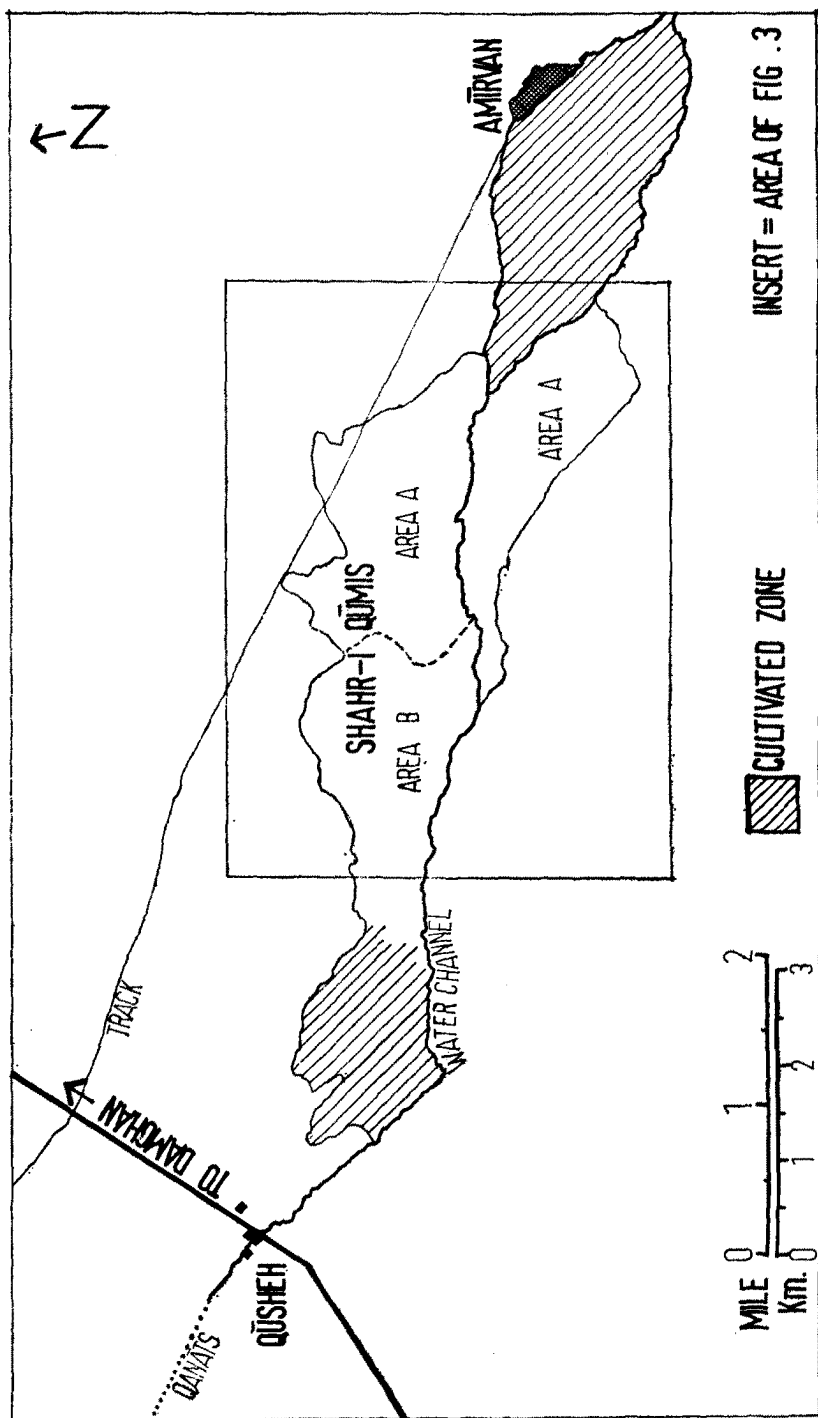


FIG. 2

INSERT = AREA OF FIG. 3

orientation (fig. 2). Surface evidence, discussed in section IV of this paper, suggests that several phases of occupation are represented here, i.e. the building of one city at a later period immediately adjacent to and partly over the remains of an older site.

The whole of Shahr-i Qūmis has been greatly disturbed by water erosion. Several seasonally dry watercourses have formed very broad, shallow channels entirely across the ruin area (figs. 2, 3; pl. I). This drainage pattern has washed away all cultural deposits at such places. Several other, far more restricted channels have cut sharp, deep incursions through the site. The occurrence of much localized surface erosion gives Shahr-i Qūmis a very broken and uneven appearance (pls. I and II(a)).

The site is surrounded by a flat and nearly treeless semi-arid plain. In the distant north and west, the sharp rising slopes of the Elburz range can be seen. A small, uneven encirclement of isolated hills is situated some three miles (4.8 km.) to the south. In the east the village of Amīrvan and several other scattered settlements consisting of a few mud-brick structures each are spaced near the edge of the great salt desert, the Dasht-i Lut. The southernmost extent of Jackson's proposed site for Hecatompylos, Frāt, is located 15 miles (24 km.) to the east of Qūmis.

It is hardly possible, within the limits of this paper, to describe all of the ruin features at Shahr-i Qūmis. Such discussion will therefore be confined to the most significant remains. Other features will be briefly summarized.

Approximately one and a quarter miles (2.0 km.) south-east of the Naqqāre Khāne mound, within the Qūmis site, is a second, unnamed mound (fig. 3, Region VII; pl. II(b)). This prominence measures approximately 22×16 m. at the base. From ground level to the highest surviving point the height is approximately 6 m. It was at once apparent that this mound had been dug into at a recent date. There had been much cutting-away of the clay fill from the sides, while the whole upper extent of the structure had been scooped out. Pick-marks were clearly visible in the hard, tan-coloured clay of the remaining ruin, and faintly distinguishable tyre treads were noted leading up to the workings. The dug-out clay had obviously been hauled away. It would seem that the earth was removed by local workers who use such soil for garden fill.

The mound was clearly not a *tepe*. There was no evidence of stratified deposit. Close examination, in fact, showed that the structure was built of mud brick now much weathered. Within the dug-out upper area of the mound the remains of a curiously constructed vaulted chamber had been exposed. This partly destroyed chamber still survived, in its lower part, for a length of some 2 m. The width was a uniform 88 cm. The vaulting, which is in a much more fragmentary condition, consists of four succeeding arches, each built with a springing which joins some 10 cm. higher than the arch immediately to the rear. This unusual method of construction produces a sort of recessed or stepped vault (pl. II(c)). The thickness of each of these so-called stepped vaults is approximately 33 cm. The vaulting rises to a slightly wedge-shaped terminus. The chamber was constructed of unbaked mud bricks measuring 38–39 cm. square \times 10 cm. thick. The sides of the chamber have been coated with a mud plaster.

The remains of two other chambers, the roofings of which have been totally destroyed, were situated at either side of the partly intact structure (pl. II(b)). There could be little doubt as to what purpose these chambers had originally served. Scattered partly within the

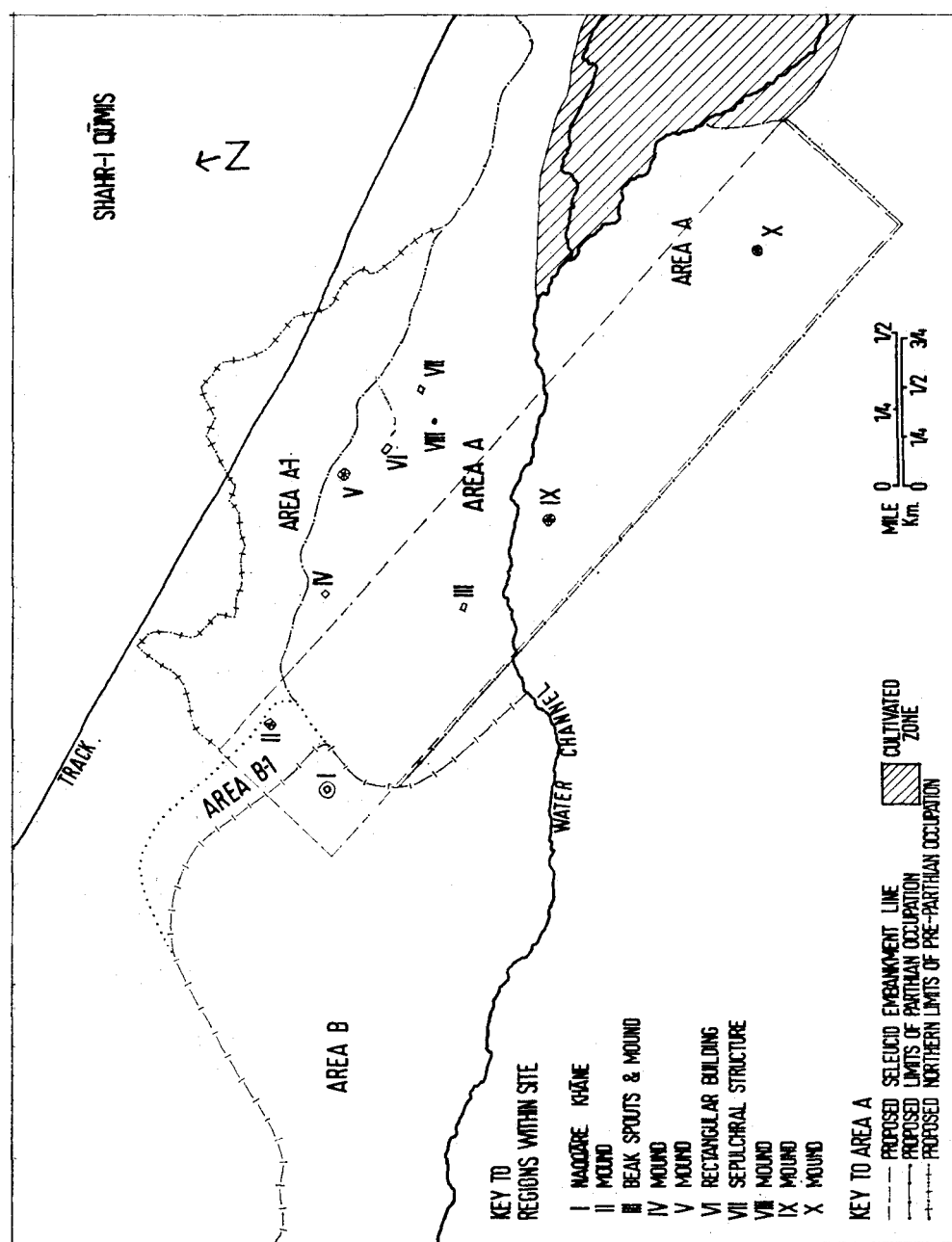
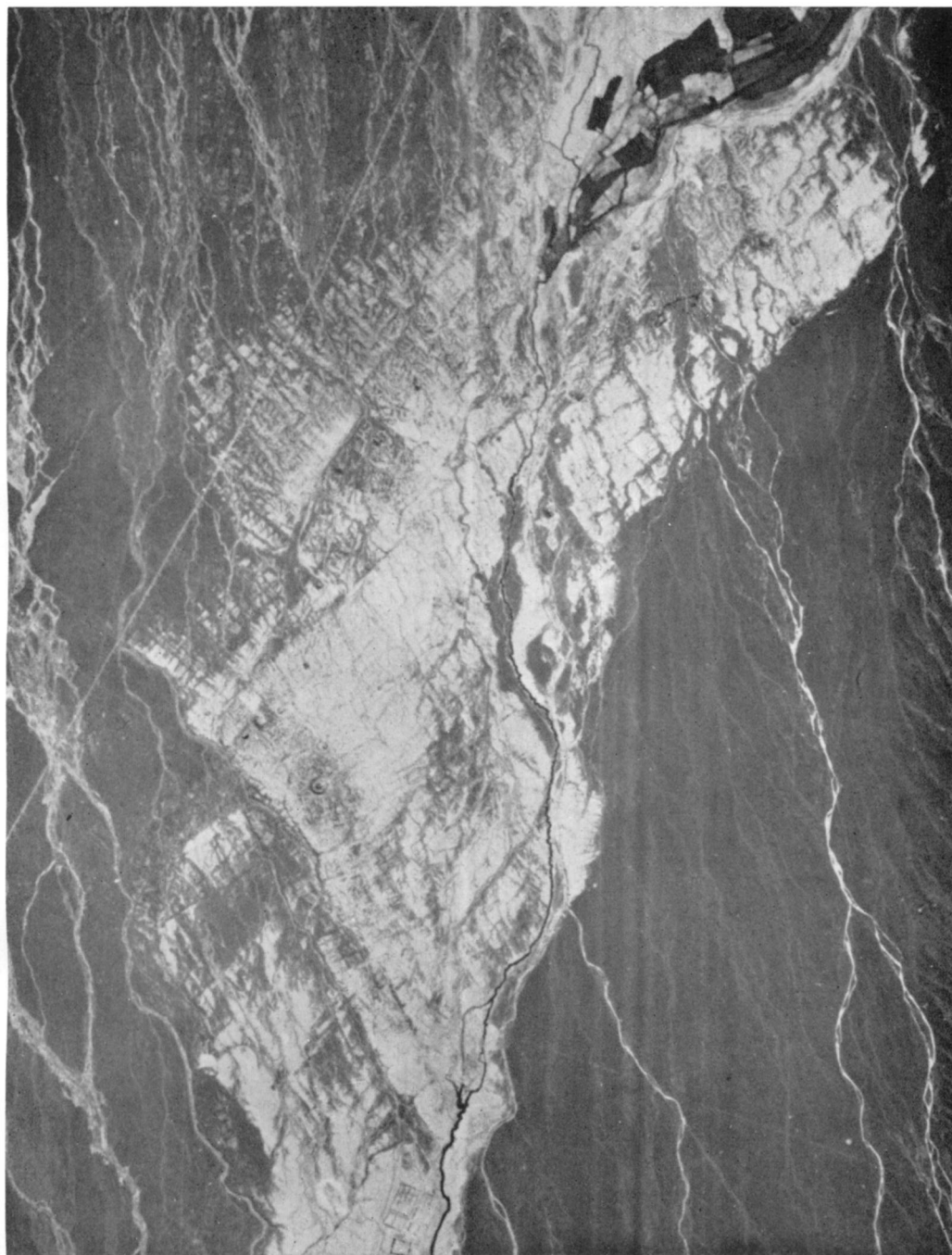


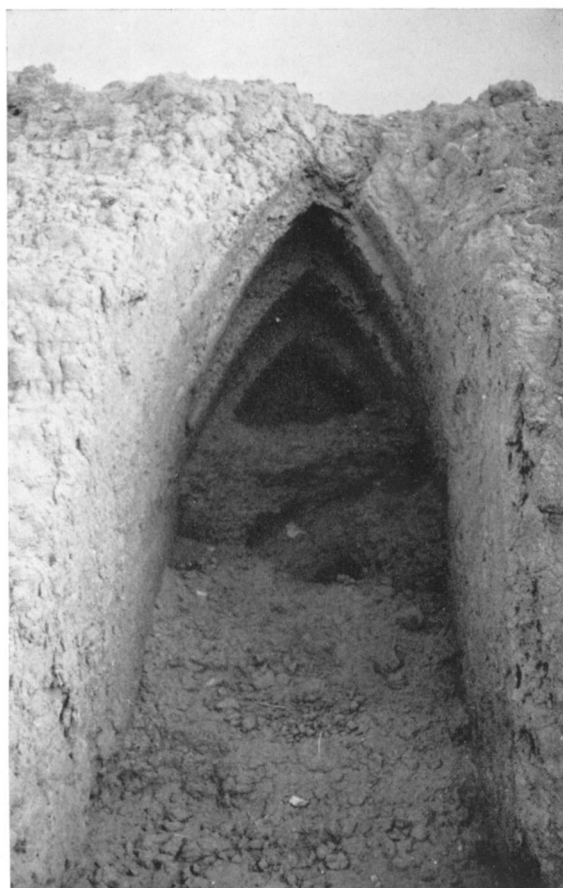
FIG. 3



Aerial view of Shahr-i Qūmis.



(a) View of Shahr-i Qūmis looking south-east from the Naqqāre Khāne.



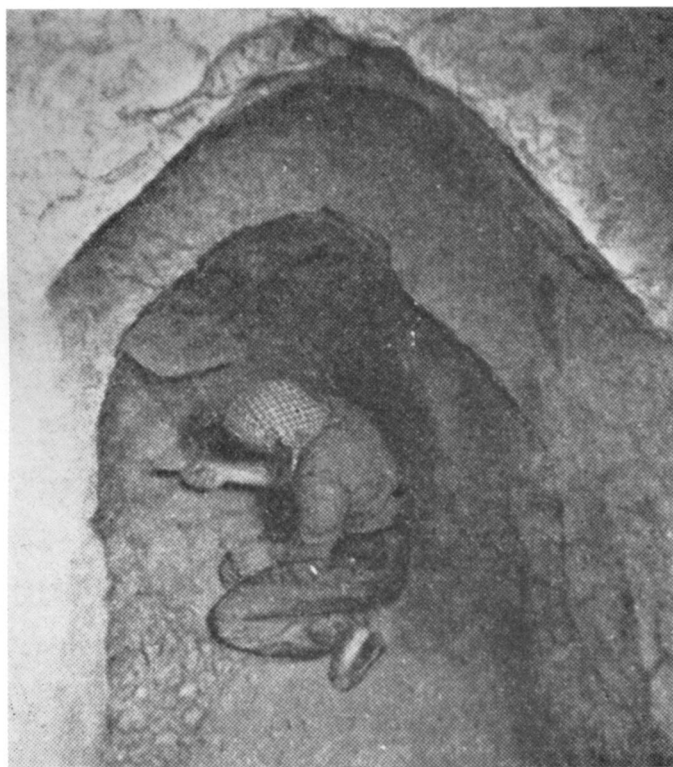
(c) Detail of step-vaulted recess of the sepulchral monument.



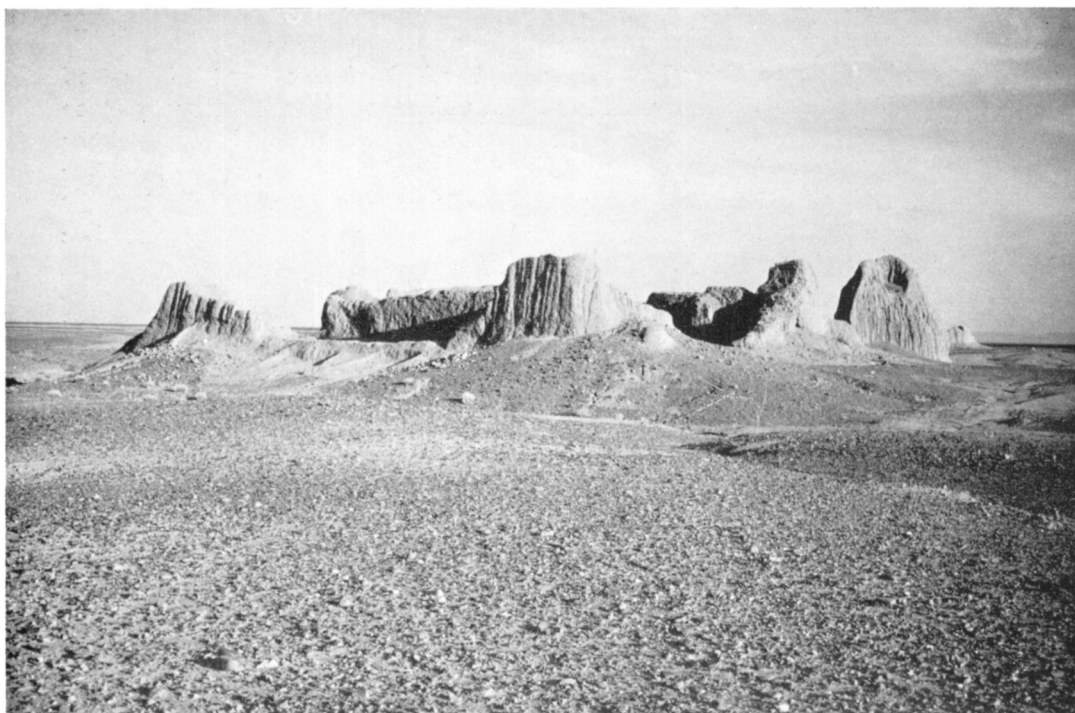
b) Sepulchral monument at Qūmis showing step-vaulted chamber.



(a) Exposed face of rounded-vault in the lower area of the Qūmis sepulchral monument.



(b) Step-vaulted passage in Koi Krylgan Kala.



(a) Rectangular building at Qūmis viewed from the north-west.



(b) The Naqqāre Khāne at Shahr-i Qūmis.

two side chambers just mentioned and partly over the dug-out upper surface of the mound were a number of human and horse or donkey bones and skulls. There were also a large number of pottery fragments, most of which appeared to have been newly broken and none of which showed any signs of surface weathering. In view of the complete lack of stratified deposits here it would seem that the chambers could only have been used as tomb receptacles (*loculi*).

Before proceeding with the problem of dating the Qūmis sepulchral structure, one additional feature of its construction will be noted. We must turn to the eastern facing of the mound at a place where soil-seekers have excavated deeply into the upper-area clay fill. Here, some 3.5 m. above the present base-level of the mound, the upper terminal section of a low, rounded-arch facing, built of broken mud bricks, had been exposed (pl. III(a)). The chamber of which this vault is the apparent entrance is situated directly behind the rear extent of the upper chamber earlier described. Except for the very limited area already exposed, this second access point has not been dug into. The important feature to note at this time is that here, within a single structure, we have two entirely different types of vaulting: one a stepped, wedge-shaped construction and the other, situated behind, consisting of a more rounded form.

Several close parallels to our so-called stepped vault are to be found in the ruins of a fortified building located in the Soviet Uzbek Republic, 355 miles (568 km.) north-east of Meshed. This structure, called Koi Krylgan Kala, is situated close to the north bank of the Oxus, near Turtkul in the Kara Kalpak district. Soviet archaeological excavations carried out by Tolstov at this site show the building to have a modest radius of only 42 m. Within the structural area are two access passages leading from a lower to a higher level, the roofing of each of which is composed of a series of three-stepped, wedge-shaped vaults of mud brick. A third step-vaulted passage joins two rooms on the same level⁵³ (pl. III(b)). No details of brick size or of construction technique are given, but the close parallel with the Qūmis structure is obvious.

Soviet archaeologists have assigned Koi Krylgan Kala to the Khwarezmian culture of the 4th and 3rd centuries B.C. The Khwarezmians, a people not conquered by Alexander, are known from classical sources to have lived in this area. The region, indeed, is still called Khorezm.

Parthian tomb structures uncovered by the Soviet archaeologist Vmoraya at Old Nisa present further parallels to the Qūmis *loculi*. Four such chambers were found at Old Nisa. Three of these *loculi* were built with low, rounded vaults of broken mud bricks. The span of the vaults in the Nisa chambers measures approximately 2 m. in each case. The fourth *loculus* carries a wedge-shaped vault with a slightly elliptical form. The vault is constructed of mud bricks set edgewise, and has a span of 1 m. 10 cm. Mud bricks used in the Nisa sepulchres measure 40 × 40 cm. square × 10–12 cm. thick,⁵⁴ though mud bricks 38–39 cm. square were used in other Parthian buildings excavated at Nisa. Thus we seem to have a number of similarities of construction between the Nisa and Qūmis *loculi*. Each of the two structural groups utilizes both wedge-shaped and rounded vault-forms;

⁵³ Cf. S. Tolstov, "Raboty Khorezmskoy Ekspeditsii an SSR po raskorkam pamyatnika IV–III v.v. do n.z.—Koi Krylgan Kala", *Vestnik Drevnej Istorii*, 1953, Part 1, 160–65.

⁵⁴ Cf. Vmoraya, op. cit., 68–9.

both are built with mud-brick sizes favoured by the Parthians and both have mud-plaster coatings applied to the inner surface of each of their various chambers. The one difference would seem to be that whereas the Nisa wedge-shaped vault consists of a continuous, even surface, the Qūmis example is recessed like the step-vaulted passages of Koi Krylgan Kala. On the basis of a coin find and other features, the Nisa *loculi* have been dated by Soviet archaeologists to the first century B.C. It would thus seem that while incorporating various features common to later Parthian building technique, the Qūmis example also used a structural form, the stepped vault, which it shares with the earlier-dated building at Koi Krylgan Kala. The writer would suggest the late 2nd or early 1st centuries B.C. as a plausible date for the Qūmis tomb structure.

Tolstov called the site of Koi Krylgan Kala Khwarezmian. But this is as much a geographical as a chronological designation, and does not exclude the possibility of a Parthian association. The territory of ancient "Chorasmia" did, in fact, adjoin that of Parthia.⁵⁵ Koi Krylgan Kala seems to have been built in early Parthian times, and its occupants may well have been members of the Parthian confederacy. Its circular ground plan and walls are highly characteristic of Parthian architecture,⁵⁶ and although at first sight the remains suggest a military structure, more recently Soviet archaeologists have suggested that its purpose may have been funerary.⁵⁷

The presence of human and equid bones apparently deposited in the same burial structure at Qūmis is not known from the later tomb chambers at Nisa. Nor are animal remains found in the 1st-century-A.D. Parthian burials excavated at Garmsi in North-Eastern Iran.⁵⁸ But here again, it is quite possible that the Qūmis interments represent the survival of an earlier tradition of burial of a one-time nomadic people, the Parni-Parthians, when horses—and donkeys?—were of prime, everyday importance. The establishment of a more urban Parthian society would lessen the daily need for such mounts, at least among the settled ranks of the tribe, and could thus result in the discontinuation of older customs.

The practice of including the bodies of sacrificed horses in burial *tumuli* among the Scythians of South Russia during the 6th, 5th, and 4th centuries B.C. is, of course, well known.⁵⁹ This custom, described by Herodotus,⁶⁰ is confirmed by archaeological investigation. In such a context the Scythian association of the early Parni could be significant for the interpretation of our site. Justin refers to the Scythian background of the Arsacid Parthians.⁶¹

Classical writers use the word Scythian to designate the mainly Iranian nomadic peoples of the Eurasian plains. Primarily the expression referred to the "Scythians" of South Russia, but the nomads of the Aralo-Caspian region who shared the same way of

⁵⁵ Herodotus, III, 17. On the Khwarezmians see W. Tarn, *Alexander the Great, II: Sources and studies*, Cambridge, 1948, 293–4.

⁵⁶ Cf. R. Ghirshman, *Iran: Parthian and Sasanian*, 1962, 34–5.

⁵⁷ A. Mongait, *Archaeology in the U.S.S.R.* (Pelican ed.), 1961, 238.

⁵⁸ The Parthian tombs at Garmsi in North-East Azerbaijan (not to be confused with Soviet excavations at Garmsi in the Armenian S.S.R.) have been excavated by the Iranian Department of Antiquities, but are not as yet published.

⁵⁹ On Scythian horse-burials see M. Rostovtzeff, *Iranians and Greeks in South Russia*, Oxford, 1922, 45, 47, 49. See also T. Rice, *The Scythians*, 1957, 70–72, 92, 109.

⁶⁰ Herodotus, IV, 71–73.

⁶¹ Justin, XLI, 1.

life were also included in the Greek term. The Achaemenid Persians used the word Saka for all these tribal peoples.⁶²

Strabo describes the Aparni (Parni), i.e. the Arsacid Parthians, as a branch of the confederation of the Daae (Dahae). He regarded both the Saka and the Daae as nomadic and "Scythian".⁶³ The differences between these various groups would seem ethnic rather than cultural. Indeed, the Scythians, the (Transcaspian) Sakas, and the Parni (Parthians) all spoke related Iranian languages and according to Pliny they lived on equal terms with each other.⁶⁴ These people thus may well have shared such cultural and religious practices as that of horse-burials.

That the role of the horse was as important to the Parni-Parthians as to the other nomads is confirmed by Justin who says of them: "they ride on horseback on all occasions; on horses they go to war, and to feasts; on horses they discharge public and private duties; on horses they go abroad, meet together, traffic and converse".⁶⁵

The second major ruin-feature to be noted is a rectangular, mud-brick structure measuring approximately 31 × 50 cm. (fig. 3, Region VI; pl. IV(a)); it is located some 250 m. to the north-west of the burial mound. In this case, however, we seem to be dealing with a perfectly straightforward building which has eventually fallen into ruins. Disintegrated mud brick fallen from the upper part of the structure has now filled in much of the ground-level area of the ruin to a height of from 2 to 3 m. It was only because of this solid deposit of clay that portions of the outer walls, fragmentary as they now are, have survived (pl. IV(a)). Much of the building's fill had obviously been recently removed, no doubt by soil-seekers.

It would be useless to speculate at this time on the original nature and internal plan of this rectangular structure; only excavation can clarify these points. The building is merely noted here as the largest surviving ruin at the Qūmis site.

One feature common to both the multi-tomb monument and the rectangular building at Shahr-i Qūmis should perhaps be mentioned. Incorporated within the fabric of the mud bricks of both these structures are small, fragmentary sherds of typical chalcolithic painted pottery. We have already noted that the ground-surface outside the limits of the Qūmis site is quite stony. It would thus seem that the clay to produce the mud bricks of these two structures was obtained from a *tepe* or ruin-site of the chalcolithic period located somewhere in the vicinity.

A third ruin at Shahr-i Qūmis is that of the Naqqāre Khāne (fig. 3, Region I; pl. IV(b)). This structure is composed of two separate elements. First there is a circular outer clay platform measuring some 65 m. in diameter and rising to a height of approximately 3.5 m. On the centre of the platform is a small ruined circular building. The remains of this upper, citadel-like structure survive, in part, to a height of 3 m.

As with the two ruins which have been considered previously, the Naqqāre Khāne has recently suffered from the effects of soil-seekers. Large sections of earthen fill have been

⁶² W. Tarn, *The Greeks in Bactria and India*, 79.

⁶³ Strabo, 11.VIII.2.

⁶⁴ Pliny, VI, 19 and 29. On the nomadic nature of these several tribal elements see Tarn, *op. cit.*, 80; Rice, *op. cit.*, 21-2; Justin, XLI, 3.

⁶⁵ Justin, XLI, 3.

completely dug out and hauled away (pl. IV(b)). This digging activity has exposed the walls of a number of once vaulted rooms all orientated towards the centre point of the building and radiating toward the circular outer wall. The rooms thus take a form similar to that of the space which divides the spokes of a wagon wheel. The mud bricks of which Naqqāre Khāne are constructed measure 39–40 cm. square \times 10 cm. thick. The circular plan would suggest Parthian-Sasanian influence, and is strikingly similar to that of Koi Krylgan Kala. It would be intriguing to consider that the Naqqāre Khāne—in its earliest foundation at least—may (like Koi Krylgan Kala) have been used for funerary purposes. But, of course, excavation will be necessary before a clearer understanding of this structure can be gained.

The term Naqqāre Khāne is an Arabic loan-word to Persian meaning “drum-house”. The phrase commonly refers to a small cupola-like structure found on the roofs of some mosques, where the beating of drums does take place at certain times. The use of the term in association with the Qūmis ruin is no doubt one of visual comparison rather than of literal application. Various other ruins in north Iran are similarly named.

IV. THE POTTERY OF QŪMIS

Typically Islamic glazed-pottery sherds are found continuously for some 100 m. to the east and for over 1 km. to the west and south-west of Naqqāre Khāne. The earliest Islamic sherds noted were of the 10th and 11th centuries. These include the well-known Sari style of a bird motif worked on a white slip and a Nishapur type consisting of black, floreated kufic patterns drawn over a yellow ground. Eleventh- and twelfth-century ceramics were represented by typically North Persian sgraffiato wares of the period and by transparent green, lead-glazed plainwares. Seljuk and later pre-Mongol sherds of the 12th and early 13th centuries included finely made, hard-textured, ring-based bowls of pink or white clay, with characteristic transparent turquoise glazes. Other sherds of this period included extremely thin-walled bowls and cups, some with scroll patterns incised on the inner surface, which were overglazed in white, turquoise, or dark blue. Sherds of pre-Mongol lustreware, with blue background glaze, were also seen. No ceramics of a later period were in evidence.

The apparent terminal dating of the Naqqāre Khāne pottery in the pre-Mongol era suggests a possible final abandonment of the structure and that area of the site at the time of the Mongol invasion of Persia. We do, in fact, know that Subutai Bahadur, a chief of Genghis Khan, marched through the district of Qūmis in A.D. 1220. Subutai Bahadur is reported to have savagely attacked the area, including both the cities of Damghan and Semnan.⁶⁶ The Naqqāre Khāne is, of course, located close to the main road between those two cities. Local tradition also relates the final abandonment of the site to the Mongol invasion.

We must now differentiate between the pottery of the late Naqqāre Khāne Islamic settlement and that of the far greater area of the Shahr-i Qūmis site. Three separate locations will be considered. Amongst the Islamic potsherds found to the west of Naqqāre

⁶⁶ Cf. H. Howorth, *History of the Mongols*, 1876, I, 82.

Khāne are other sherds of a family of red-clay wares; some of these are without slip, others have a dull cream, sometimes sandy-textured surfacing. Characteristic features of this family of wares are bevelled and grooved rims. More numerous examples of this type of pottery are found to the north-east of Naqqāre Khāne in Area B-1, as shown on fig. 3. Ceramic vessels with similar rim forms were recovered at the Sasanian site of Qaṣr-i Abū Naṣr in Fars, the pottery of which is not as yet published. A number of fragments of closely faceted, cut-glass containers were also noted in Area B-1. The cut glass is of a very thick-walled type which is usually considered to be of Sasanian rather than of Islamic manufacture. No patterned or polychrome-glazed Islamic sherds were seen in Area B-1. The evidence of pottery distribution, then, would indicate that our Islamic town was built over part of a larger, presumably pre-Islamic settlement, the later occupation covering most of Area B but none of Area B-1.

Located to the south-east of the Naqqāre Khāne, past the approximate 100 m. limit of Islamic sherd finds in that direction, is by far the largest area of Shahr-i Qūmis. This division of the site, marked Area A on figs. 2 and 3, extends two miles (3.2 km.) at a width which varies from approximately one and a half miles (2.4 km.) to a mile (1.6 km.). The sherds of the south-east Qūmis area comprise a family of pottery forms and textures which are quite obviously not of the same period as those of the adjoining Areas B or B-1.

Nearly all the pottery of our Area A—which also contains the sepulchral monument and the rectangular building already discussed—falls into two distinct types. There are red-clay wares, some with a red surface characterized by either a naturally smooth, soapy appearance, or a burnish frequently produced by the parallel application of long vertical striation marks. Some dry-surfaced redwares were also seen, but with profiles different from those found in the western Qūmis area.

The second distinct family of wares in Area A consists of clay vessels of salmon base with white or cream surface. The texture of this group appears dull and frequently sandy.

The earliest stylistic forms noted within Area A were red-clay sherds of vessels fitted with long beak spouts. This type seems to predominate in Region III (fig. 3) of the site. Beak spouts are, of course, a common feature of Middle Iron Age pottery of the Iranian plateau. Similar forms have been found at Sialk, Hasanlu, Khorvin, and Ziweh and in Luristan. The dating of beak-spouted vessels varies at different sites, but the period of their most frequent occurrence seems to have been from the 10th to the 8th centuries B.C. Vessels of this type from Ziweh and Khorvin are given a 7th-century-B.C. terminal dating.⁶⁷

A common feature of the redwares of Qūmis A is the horned handle. Such handles, set vertically on to vessels, have slight knobs or dull upward-pointed protrusions at their upper extremity near the point where the handle is fixed to the surface of the vessel. Horned handles are known from the earlier Iron Age. They, however, attained a height of artistic development on metal vessels of the Achaemenid period. At this later date such handles take the form of finely-moulded, detailed representations of animals, complete with extended horns. This feature was necessarily more stylized when applied to ceramics. The original horned concept became further modified as the device continued to be used. A type of

⁶⁷ R. Dyson, "Problems of protohistoric Iran as seen from Hasanlu", *J. Near East. Stud.*, XXIV, July 1965, 204 ff.

horned handle was employed on certain Greek black-glazed *kantharoi* of the 4th and 3rd centuries B.C.⁶⁸ Most of the examples noted at Qūmis are so developed that all suggestion of animation is lost, and they would appear to represent a late application of this style.

One example, a rim-fragment of a carinated cup or bowl, noted in Region III (fig. 3) at Qūmis, is worth special mention. This sherd, red-brown in colour, is characterized by a 2 cm. lip-rim extending horizontally outward from the vessel. Below the rim is a smooth, vertical band 1.5 cm. in width, under which the vessel's profile follows an inverse slant to the centre base. A number of exact parallels to this form, dated to the 6th and 5th centuries B.C., were found by Scerrato during the Italian excavations at Dahan-i Ghulaman, an Achaemenid site in Iranian Sistan.⁶⁹ Another close parallel of this type was recovered by Schmidt at the Spring Cemetery near Persepolis. Schmidt dates these burials to the late Achaemenid or early post-Achaemenid period.⁷⁰

The second family of pottery found in Area A at Qūmis consists of the salmon-coloured wares with cream or white surface. Characteristic features of pouring-vessels of this ware are short cylindrical spouts. Some of these spouts are open at the top while others form completely enclosed tubes. The spouts are joined to their vessels a few centimetres below the rim, which is almost always characterized by an inward-moulded rib-rim. Cups and bowls of this family of white-surfaced ware are frequently fitted with horizontal, loop-like handles. These loops are attached to the vessels a few centimetres below the rim and are set at a slight upward angle to the surface which they join. This slant is sometimes effected by the outermost extremity of the handle being bent upward a few centimetres from the handle's two horizontal points of junction with the vessel. Horizontal cup handles from Iron Age Iran are known. But the Iron Age examples are more commonly fitted fully level with the actual vessel-rim and extend horizontally outward without the upward angulation. Examples of this older form were found at Qūmis, but mainly among the soapy-surfaced redwares. The oblique handles found on the white-slip ware would seem to have a more direct relationship with Hellenistic cups and vessels of the 4th and 3rd centuries B.C., where such low-fitted, angulated handles are a distinctive feature.⁷¹

Vertical handles are also sometimes found on large vessels of the white-surfaced ware. But in every example noted of this type, the handles showed no horned element; they were instead much smaller and more crescent-shaped. Comparative evidence would suggest, then, that the white-surfaced ware at Qūmis was of a later date than most of the family of horned-handled, red-ware vessels found there.

No examples of this group of white-surfaced wares were noted in the area marked A-1 on fig. 3. The sherds here were of the earlier Iron Age in general form. Sherds suggesting known Achaemenid forms were also to be seen in this part of the site. Area A-1, then, appears to have been abandoned some time before the much more extensive region of Area A.

⁶⁸ Cf. C. Clairmont, "Greek pottery from the Near East", *Berytus*, XII, 1956-58, 20 and pl. VI, nos. 4, 5, 6, 9, 10.

⁶⁹ U. Scerrato, "Excavations at Dahan-i Ghulaman", *East and West*, N.S., XVI, March-June, 1966, 26 and fig. 52.

⁷⁰ E. Schmidt, *Persepolis II*, Chicago, 1957, 123 and pl. 89, no. 7.

⁷¹ Clairmont, *op. cit.*, 18 and pl. V, no. 6.

Almost all of the sherds of an inverse-rimmed, flat-based bowl, 6 cm. in height, were noted at the disturbed ruins of the sepulchral monument (in Area A). The inverse rim is, of course, a very Greek feature and is a common form for Hellenistic cups and bowls of the 4th and 3rd centuries B.C.⁷²

The greater number of sherds seen at the Qūmis sepulchral monument were of the salmon-coloured, white-surfaced ware, although a few dry-surfaced redwares were also represented. As earlier stated, most of the sherds associated with the tomb structure showed evidence of having been recently broken. Few of these sherds were weathered from exposure. It would appear that much of this pottery was thrown out by the soil-seekers who have worked there.

On the basis of close architectural parallels, and from other considerations, we have tentatively dated the Qūmis tomb structure to the late 2nd or early 1st centuries B.C. The burials are submitted to be Parthian. The white-surface ware which has certainly come from these tomb chambers should, therefore, also be Parthian, as would much of the vast scattering of the same family of pottery found over the whole of Qūmis Area A. This conclusion requires further comment.

Unfortunately, we know almost nothing of Parthian pottery from the Iranian plateau. The excavation of some 30 Middle Parthian, hill-cut tombs located near the town of Garmi in the extreme north-east corner of Iranian Azerbaijan has produced a rough-textured redware. In general the Garmi pottery would seem to represent a local survival of traditional pottery forms known from the Iron Age ceramics excavated at nearby Kalar Dasht. The Garmi pottery thus cannot be considered representative of the period for the whole of Parthian Iran. We are presented with a similar problem in considering the Parthian material from Susa in Khuzistan. The area of Khuzistan is geographically isolated from the Iranian plateau by the southern Zagros Mountains. The ceramics of Khuzistan from the beginnings, therefore, have shown a closer stylistic relationship with the pottery of the more accessible Mesopotamian plain. Thus we find parallels between the Parthian blue- and green-glaze pottery recovered at Susa and Parthian ceramic material of the same period excavated at Seleucia on the Tigris.⁷³ There are also stylistic similarities between the Seleucia pottery and that of Parthian Dura-Europus.⁷⁴ As in Khuzistan, on the other hand, a dissimilarity of texture and form has usually distinguished the ceramic styles common to the pottery of the Iranian plateau from the forms produced in Mesopotamia.

It does, of course, follow that once the Parni-Parthians had gained political control over Mesopotamia, broader trade relations within the expanding Parthian empire would develop. It is quite possible, then, as in the Hellenistic period in Iran, that certain later pottery styles of Mesopotamia would be adopted on the plateau. But the Parthians were not firmly established in Mesopotamia until the late 2nd century B.C. We know too that

⁷² *Ib.*, p. 15-16 and Pl. IV, no. 17-23.

⁷³ The ceramics of the Parthian levels at Susa, excavated by Professor R. Ghirshman, have not yet been published, though Professor Ghirshman has kindly allowed the writer to study this material on site. For profile drawings of several of the most frequently occurring Parthian pottery types at Susa see R. Ghirshman, *Iran*, 1961, 281, fig. 84. For parallels with Parthian ceramics from Seleucia see N. Debevoise, *Parthian pottery from Seleucia on the Tigris*, Ann Arbor, 1934, 69, 79, 103, 129.

⁷⁴ Cf. N. Toll, "The green glazed pottery", *The excavations at Dura-Europos, Final report*, IV, Part 1, Fascicle I, New Haven, 1943, 73.

various contending Arsacids prevented the complete political unification of Mesopotamia with high Iran until some years after the death of Mithradates II in 87 B.C. That pottery of Parthian Qūmis to which we have given a tentative terminal dating of the early 1st century B.C. would therefore not seem to be of a sufficiently late period to show contemporary Mesopotamian influence; and it does not do so. We cannot then, except in the broadest terms, expect to draw close parallels between the Parthian ceramics of Seleucia or of Susa and the earlier Parthian pottery of Qūmis.⁷⁵

An example of this resistance of the plateau to absorbing Mesopotamian cultural influences is shown in the use of ceramic glazes. Both blue and green glazes were commonly applied to pottery of the Parthian and Sasanian periods in Mesopotamia and in Khuzistan. Yet such glazes are almost unknown on the Iranian plateau until the Islamic period.⁷⁶ Only one blue-glazed sherd was noted near the Qūmis tomb monument. This was a small, partly iridized, vertical handle of almost circular shape. The parallel, in form, to similar handles of our white-slip wear was quite apparent.

There are then, except for Khuzistan, almost no stratified examples of Parthian pottery from archaeological sites in Iran. The pottery of Parthian Nisa does not yet seem to have been published.

That the family of white-surfaced ware at Qūmis, on the other hand, shares many common features with early Hellenistic pottery of Eastern Asia has been confirmed by the findings of Dr. Paul Bernard, Director of the Délégation Archéologique Française en Afghanistan. Dr. Bernard's careful excavations at the purely Greco-Bactrian site of Ay Khanum located on the Oxus River in Northern Afghanistan have produced numerous sherds of a kitchenware pottery of orange-salmon base with white surface. Both inverse rims and obliquely set horizontal handles were represented. The site of Ay Khanum was occupied by the Bactrian Greeks from at least the early 3rd century B.C. until the latter part of the 2nd century B.C. We have previously noted that other Greek pottery dated to the 4th and 3rd centuries B.C., and found in the Middle East, also shows the common features of inverse rims and obliquely fitted horizontal handles.

The white-surface ware of Qūmis, of course, is not all Hellenistic, but much of it is most certainly a Hellenizing pottery. This localized adoption of otherwise foreign craft-forms and techniques is, indeed, a reciprocal phenomenon of post-Achaemenid Iran. Traditional Iranian building methods and bulbous Persepolitan column bases, for example, were adapted by the Seleucid rulers in the East. The Arsacids, on the other hand, readily assimilated certain features of the Greek civilization which they found and replaced in many areas of their expanding empire.

We find purely Greek decorative devices and Greek architectural forms being used to embellish the 3rd and early 2nd-century B.C. Arsacid palace-complex at Old Nisa.⁷⁷ Parthian coinage from its inception in the late 3rd century B.C. carried Greek inscriptions. Thus that early Parthian pottery should, in part, be characterized by Hellenizing features is quite in keeping with what we might expect.

⁷⁵ One element which seems common to both the early Dura Parthian ceramic material and to much of the Qūmis pottery is the horned handle, cf. Toll, *op. cit.*, 12.

⁷⁶ R. Ettinghausen, "Parthian and Sassanian pottery", *A survey of Persian art*, ed. A. Pope, I, 651, 667.

⁷⁷ Cf. n. 9 above.

V. A SITE FOR HECATOMPYLOS

A measure of Hellenistic cultural influence would no doubt have survived at Parthian Hecatompylos. For we have here a city under continuous Greek military occupation from the time of Alexander's visit in 330 B.C. until the conquest of Parthia by the Parni in about 238 B.C. The identification of this city as a *polis* is further indication of its purely Greek character. The Parni-Parthians, already Hellenizing, as we have seen from the Nisa finds, would most certainly have absorbed much of what they found at Hecatompylos to supplement their own less developed cultural traditions.

But, although the Arsacids undoubtedly adapted certain Greek craft techniques, they also maintained clear cultural links with the nomadic part of the Parni. It is the results of this hybrid merging of eastern and western tradition which are so clearly evident at Shahr-i Qūmis. This site is so large and so exactly placed that it would seem difficult to propose any city of the period, other than Hecatompylos, which could claim it.

It will be remembered that the writer first located Qūmis by applying the measured distances given by both Strabo and Pliny between the Caspian Gates and Hecatompylos. Indeed, if we consider that the older occupied division of Shahr-i Qūmis (Area A) is situated some three miles (4.8 km.) east of the present Khurāsān road, Strabo's total distance of 128.5 miles (207 km.) from the Caspian Gates would extend almost exactly to this point.

A sepulchral monument with close architectural parallels to known Parthian tomb structures at Old Nisa has been described and tentatively dated to the late 2nd or early 1st century B.C. Pottery forms dating from at least the 8th to the 2nd centuries B.C., found within Qūmis Areas A and A-1, have been discussed. The Islamic settlement at Qūmis Area B and an apparently earlier cultural level in Areas B and B-1 are considered to be later reoccupations, founded adjacent to and built partly over the abandoned Area A.

Mr. David Stronach, who with the writer visited Qūmis on 1st January, 1967, has observed that in many parts of the site the cultural deposit is no thicker than 1 m. If Shahr-i Qūmis is in fact Hecatompylos, then this shallow deposit is certainly in keeping with what we might expect. Seleucid Hecatompylos was never described as an impressive city. Its situation close to the important Khurāsān road, in an unpopulated area, would rather suggest one of a series of Seleucid military colonies used, in part, as a staging-post for armies moving across the desert.

When the Parni-Parthians made Hecatompylos a royal capital in the late 3rd century B.C. the city would certainly have undergone expansion. We have, however, proposed that the greater part of Hecatompylos was abandoned by the Parthians during the early 1st century B.C. The ceramic evidence at Qūmis would seem to support a terminal phase of occupation in Area A at approximately this time. A hundred years after their coming to Hecatompylos, when the Arsacids overran Northern Mesopotamia, contemporary evidence suggests that the Parthian following was still restless and unsettled. Strabo, for example, states that the Parthians made their residence there, not at Seleucia on the Tigris, but in Ctesiphon across the river, "in order that the Seleucians might not be oppressed by having the Scythian folk or soldiery quartered amongst them".⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Strabo, 16.I.16.

A part of the much earlier Parthian settlement at Hecatompylos then very likely consisted of a sort of seasonal, nomadic tent-town, largely occupied by Strabo's "Scythian folk". The more sedentary, Hellenized residents of Hecatompylos would have continued to occupy the older, permanent buildings of the city. The Arsacid leadership no doubt appropriated the government quarter.

The existence of a shallow cultural deposit over much of Shahr-i Qūmis would, indeed, appear to support the probability of a rapid expansion, temporary occupation, and early abandonment of large areas of the site. Again the parallel with Hecatompylos would seem obvious.

The present water-supply of the Qūmis area is probably taken from the same source as in antiquity. About six miles (9.6 km.) north-west of the ruin site, the Darvār valley, which extends for some four miles (6.4 km.) in length and a quarter-mile (.4 km.) in breadth, is formed by an isolated spur of the Elburz Mountains. This valley, which is extensively cultivated with crops and trees, is irrigated by the diversion of water from a large, spring-fed stream which flows through its length. Upon passing from the valley on to the arid flatlands facing Qūmis, the remains of the stream are diverted through an underground channel. After five miles (8 km.) the stream reappears behind the Qūsheh *chaikhāne*. The water is then carried under the Damghan road and surface-channelled to the area of the Qūmis ruins, where it is used to irrigate several small agricultural holdings (fig. 2). The present water-flow at Shahr-i Qūmis is reasonably plentiful. Such a supply, without the massive diversions in the upper valley, would be greatly increased, and would certainly have been sufficient for the needs of the large city which was once located on the plain. The use of underground channels (*qanāts*) to supply water to the semi-arid neighbourhood of Hecatompylos is attested by Polybius.⁷⁹

We have yet to consider the Seleucid name for Hecatompylos, the "Hundred-Gated City". The same appellation is given by Homer to Thebes in Egypt, though Thebes does not seem ever to have been walled. That Homer's usage was essentially poetic is indicated by Diodorus, who notes others as having said that Thebes did not have one hundred gates but rather many great *propylaea* (porticoes in the form of pylons) in front of its temples. It was from these porticoes, according to Diodorus' sources, that the title of having many gates was given to the town.⁸⁰ Tarn (op. cit., 13, 14) suggests that the use of the term Hecatompylos for the Seleucid city in Persia would also appear more poetic than factual. According to Polybius, Hecatompylos was so named because roads from the surrounding districts converged there.⁸¹ But we know, again from Polybius, and from present knowledge of the climatic conditions of the area bordering on the *Khurāsān* road where Hecatompylos would be located, that this whole region consists of semi-arid wastelands, with only occasional oases. Thus the converging roads were certainly not numerous. The name of Hecatompylos would seem, then, an honorific usage of the term, indicating probably that the town had several more gates than the number usually provided for Hellenistic cities of the period.

⁷⁹ Polybius, X, 28. In northern Iran the word *kōmish* is applied to a person employed in digging *qanāts*. It may thus be that the practice of *qanāt* construction was first developed in the Qūmis/Kōmish district.

⁸⁰ Diodorus Siculus, I, 45.

⁸¹ Polybius, X, 28.

Aerial photographs do reveal what may have been the wall limits of the Seleucid foundation at Shahr-i Qūmis (pl. I and fig. 3). It would appear that these walls were almost entirely built of clay fill; they are, therefore, perhaps more properly described as embankments. This proposed feature is now very heavily eroded away and further obliterated by later expansion and overbuilding of the site. Thus no embankment remains are now seen from the ground. As aerial photos show, however, the suggested wall alignment takes the form of an elongated, rectangular grid, which is what we would expect for a Hellenistic plan. The enclosed area measures approximately 2.75 miles (4.4 km.) by 0.50 mile (.8 km.) and is oriented on a north-west to south-east axis.

Neither air photographs nor ground survey suggest any wall features at the uneven, peripheral limits of the northernmost extent of Shahr-i Qūmis Area A (fig. 3 and pl. I). This region of the site, which extends to the north-east of that area enclosed by the possible Seleucid wall alignment, contains the burial monument and much of the white-slip pottery which we have submitted to be Parthian. This family of wares is also found throughout the so-called enclosed area. But if Qūmis is to be identified with Hecatompylos, then the later Parthian city at that place must have covered a far greater area than that of the Seleucid foundation. If, as suggested, this city was indeed also used as seasonal winter quarters by a numerous tent-living nomadic people, it is doubtful that the Arsacids would have constructed a new wall to contain such a large and intermittently occupied area.

The unwalled city of Tambrax in neighbouring Hyrcania, which Polybius describes as being of great size and containing a royal palace, is a parallel example of an unfortified, though obviously important, Parthian site.⁸² The possibility that Tambrax, with its royal residence, was the principal Arsacid summer capital at one time has already been considered. Strabo notes that parts of Hyrcania were very fertile, but that the wheat that grew there remained wild because the land was not properly attended to by the Parthian "barbarians".⁸³ The apparent absence of organized agricultural production would seem to support the presence of a large nomadic element in that district. Thus the city of Tambrax, as with a part of our site, may have remained unwalled because of a temporary summer settlement there of a considerable body of migratory tribesmen.

VI. THE LOST NAME

We have earlier noted that Hecatompylos was not the original Iranian name for that city, but a Greek appellation given to the site at the time of its refoundation by Seleucus Nicator. By what name then, was Hecatompylos known in 330 B.C. when Alexander rested his troops there? In pursuing this problem a consideration of parallels would seem useful. That the Seleucid eparchies in Persia were often named after pre-Hellenistic cities of the districts which comprised such political divisions is well attested. We have for example Rhagiana, from the city of Rhagae (Old Persian *Raga*); Gabiane from Gabae (probably Old Persian **Gaba*, Middle Persian *Gay*, modern Isfahan); and Susiana (variant

⁸² *Ib.*, X, 31.

⁸³ Strabo, 11.VII.2.

Susiane) from Susa (Old Persian *Čūshā*).⁸⁴ We also have the eparchy of Comisene in which the city of Hecatompylos was located. From what source did the Greeks derive Comisene? The evidence would seem to support a Greek adaption of the Iranian name for pre-Hellenistic Hecatompylos. It is known that the present name for the ruins which the writer has proposed as Hecatompylos is Shahr-i Qūmis (the city of Qūmis). We know that Damghan, the capital of the medieval district of Qūmis, was also alternatively called Qūmis.⁸⁵ Yākūt states that Arabic *Qūmis* is equivalent to Persian *Kōmish*, a form of the name which is attested in the *Great Bundahishn*.⁸⁶ We know that the chief city of Kōmish during the Sasanian period was Shahrīstān-i Kōmish (the provincial capital of Kōmish).⁸⁷ We also know from Schmidt's excavations that the Sasanian Kōmish was not Damghan.⁸⁸ It is well attested that the modified forms of the Old Persian names of important Iranian cities survived into the Sasanian age, rather than Greek or other imposed foreign forms. For example, we have Middle Persian *Ray* from Old Persian *Raga* rather than the Seleucid Europus or the Parthian Arsacia, both once identified with this site.⁸⁹ A further example is Hamadan, derived not from the Greek Ecbatana or the later Seleucid Epiphania, but from the Old Persian Hammatāna.⁹⁰ It would therefore seem that several general conclusions can be established. First, it is clear that the capital of the Kōmish/Qūmis district in the Sasanian and Early Islamic periods was commonly referred to by the same name as the district itself. Secondly, an Iranian name for a city or a place within Persia would normally survive a completely foreign appellation imposed by foreign elements on the same site or area. If then, Shahr-i Qūmis is accepted as the site of Hecatompylos, it would reasonably follow that Shahr-i Qūmis is, in fact, a form of the original Iranian name of that place. *Comis*, as such, is not a Greek word. The lost stem would be an Old Persian reflex of the Middle Persian *Kōmish*. The possibility of Shahr-i Qūmis representing, in part, the Sasanian city of Shahrīstān-i Kōmish will be discussed in section VII of this paper.

If we accept *Kōmish* as the Middle Persian development of the Old Persian name for Hecatompylos, what form would the earlier name take?

It is, of course, a well-established rule that in transition to Middle Persian the final vowel of an Old Persian word is dropped. Thus the city of *Raga* (as rendered in Old Persian) becomes Ray in Middle Persian.⁹¹ Old Persian *Čūshā* (Susa) develops to Shūsh.⁹² *Hagmatāna*

⁸⁴ The Old Persian *Raga* is attested in the Bisitun inscription. See R. Kent, *Old Persian grammar*, New Haven, 1950, 27. For Rhagiana and Rhaga see Isidore of Charax, op. cit., 7; Rhagae, Strabo, 2.IX.1; Gabiane, Strabo, 16.I.18; Gabae, Strabo, 15.III.3. The Old Persian form **Gaba* is a reconstruction. We know from Strabo, loc. cit., that an Achaemenid palace was located at that place. Henning, following Marquart, agreed that **Gaba* would suit the Middle Persian *Gay*. On **Gaba* and *Gay* see J. Marquart, *Erānshar nach der Geographie des Ps. Moses Xorenac'i*, Berlin, 1901, 29, and W. Henning, "Gabae", *Asia Major*, II, 1951, 144. For Susiana see Strabo, 2.V.32; for Susa, Strabo, 15.III.4.

⁸⁵ Ibn Rustah, *Bibl. Geog. Arab.*, VII, 169–170.

⁸⁶ Yākūt, *Geog. Dict.*, tr. de Meynard, 464; *Great Bundahishn*, T.D. Anklesaria ed., p. 128.8 (*kwmyš*).

⁸⁷ J. Marquart, *A catalogue of the provincial capitals of Eranshahr*, Rome, 1931, 12.

⁸⁸ Cf. n. 41 above.

⁸⁹ Both the Seleucid and Parthian appellations are attested by Pliny (XI, 13).

⁹⁰ According to Step. Byz., s.v. 'Αγβάρα, Antiochus IV (Epiphanes), 175–164 B.C., gave his name to Ecbatana.

⁹¹ The place-name *Raya* occurs in the Avesta, *Yasna* XIX.18; but I. Gershevitch argues convincingly against the usual identification of this presumably eastern Iranian *Raya* with Median *Raga*; cf. *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, XXIII, 1964, 36–7.

⁹² For Old Persian *Čūshā* see R. Kent, *Old Persian grammar*, New Haven, 1950, 142–3. Susa is still known locally by the Middle Persian form *Shūsh*. The Arab-imposed variant *Sūs* has not survived.

becomes Hamadan.⁹³ **Komisha* therefore is a possible Old Persian reconstruction for Kōmish. **Kōmis* as the Persian stem of the non-Iranian Greek form of Comisene, on the other hand, is not possible, for *s* after *i* appears in Old Persian as *sh*.

The stem *kōm-* has no apparent meaning in Persian, though other purely Iranian words taking this base are Kōmishahr and Kōmistān, both medieval place-names in Fars.⁹⁴

The historicity of an earlier form **Kōmisha* cannot be established without collaborative epigraphic material. It is, however, known that the process of linguistic modifications developing toward Middle Persian began during the late Achaemenid period. The transition to Middle Persian was certainly complete by the early 1st century B.C. Thus our site of Kōmish must have been known by this form of the name already in the early Parthian period.

VII. KŌMISH OF THE FIVE TOWERS

We have now to consider the possible identification of Shahrīstān-i Kōmish, i.e. the Sasanian provincial capital of Kōmish, with a part of Shahr-i Qūmis Areas B and B-1, located beside what has been proposed as the Achaemenid city of *Kōmisha, the later Greek Hecatompylos. All that is known of Sasanian Kōmish is preserved in the *Shahrīstānīhā-i Ērān*, a short Middle Persian work containing a list of the principal towns of Iran, with a brief commentary on each place. The entry on Kōmish is quoted below in full:⁹⁵

“The provincial capital of Kōmis [Kōmish], of the Five Towers, was built by Aži Dahāk. The residence of the Parthians was there. In the reign of Yazdagird [I], son of Šabuhr [Shapur III], it was made a strong watch-station for that region, against the foraging Chol.”

Several points of similarity with Shahr-i Qūmis are immediately suggested. Aži Dahāk, the supposed founder of Kōmish, is a purely legendary figure (also the reported founder of Babylon). This reference does, however, show an awareness by the Sasanians of the relative antiquity of Kōmish as an occupied site. We have already noted, in this regard, that sherds dating at least as early as the 7th century B.C. have been found at Shahr-i Qūmis.

Probably the most significant statement, for our purpose, found in the *Shahrīstānīhā*, is that “The residence of the Parthians was there”, i.e. in Kōmish. This reference surely indicates a royal residence, such as we know Hecatompylos to have been. The *Shahrīstānīhā* does not associate the Parthians with any of the other fifty-odd provincial capitals discussed in this work.

Sasanian Shahrīstān-i Kōmish is given the added title *panz-burg* (“the five towers”) in the *Shahrīstānīhā*. *Burg* (Arabic *Burđj*), as used here, is a Persianized loan-word most probably derived through Syriac from the Latin *burgus*. Its usual meaning in Perso-Arabic

⁹³ For *Hagmatāna* see R. Kent, op. cit., 122.

⁹⁴ G. Le Strange, *Lands of the Eastern Caliphate*, Cambridge, 1930, 281–2.

⁹⁵ Marquart, *A catalogue* . . . , 12.

military nomenclature is that of a fortified tower, or a small bastion, quite often standing in isolation.⁹⁶

At Shahr-i Qūmis two large mounds are situated within the limits of the later cultural zone. One such structure supports the Naqqāre Khāne of Area B (fig. 3, region I), and the second, a square-shaped mound approximately 7.5 m. high, is found in Area B-1 (fig. 3, Region II). Other artificially raised mounds still survive within the limits of the adjoining older Qūmis Area A. The largest of these separate features are marked on fig. 3. One mound of 10 m. is found in Region V; one of 8 m. in Region IX; and still another, 10 m. in height, in Region X.

Though now badly weathered, all of these five prominences at Shahr-i Qūmis show clear evidence of solid mud-brick construction. Sherds of pottery displaying the characteristic forms and textures which we have associated with the Parthian period were seen to be distributed on and about each of these structures except that of the Naqqāre Khāne, which, although in use in the Islamic period, may have been of earlier construction. The pottery thus suggests that at least four of these features could date from the Parthian occupation of the site. Excavation may show that the mounds are, in fact, tombs, as is the smaller sepulchral mound of similar appearance and mud-brick construction, now partly dug out, which we have already considered. Their curiously solid state and great size would, indeed, strongly suggest burial monuments, perhaps of important members of the Parthian leadership, some of whom could certainly have been buried at the one-time capital of Hecatompylos. If these mounds were already in existence when the Sasanians putatively refounded a settlement at Kōmish, the attachment of *panz-burg* to the Sasanian city name would seem reasonably explained.

It is impossible at present to draw any firm conclusions on the theory that Shahr-i Qūmis Areas B and B-1 may, in part, represent the site of Sasanian Shahrstān-i Kōmish. Only excavation will define the sequence of occupation at that place. We do know, however, that Damghan could not have been the site of Sasanian Kōmish, or at least of the earlier Sasanian Kōmish. We have already noted from the *Shahrstānīhā* that Shahrstān-i Kōmish was of a remote, pre-Sasanian, foundation. Yet the various *sondages* undertaken in the early 1930's at Damghan led Schmidt to conclude that no significant pre-Islamic remains existed there.⁹⁷ But did Damghan have a late Sasanian foundation? This is a problem which may be tied to that of Kōmish of the Five Towers.

We are told by Yakūbī (A.D. 891) that Damghan was captured by the invading armies of Islam in the year A.D. 650.⁹⁸ Yakūbī also gives the earliest surviving contemporary reference to the city-name Damghan, which he also alternatively calls Qūmis. It would therefore appear that Damghan, under the traditional name of Qūmis, was the capital of the Qūmis district at the time of the Arab conquest.

Now, the last Sasanian king mentioned in the *Shahrstānīhā* is Khusro I (A.D. 531-579), and it is from his reign that the *Shahrstānīhā*, in its final Sasanian form, is thought to date.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Cf. *El*², Leiden, 1960, I, 1315, s.v. "Burdj".

⁹⁷ Cf. n. 41 above.

⁹⁸ Yakūbī, *Bibl. Geog. Arab.*, III, 355-6.

⁹⁹ The inclusion of Baghdad at the very end of the *Shahrstānīhā-i Ērān* is an obvious addition of the Early Islamic period.

During the reign of the first Khusro, therefore, Kōmish of the Five Towers must still have remained the local seat of government. Thus, if Damghan/Qūmis of the Arab conquest is not Kōmish of the Five Towers, the capital of this district must have been moved to the Damghan area near the end of the Sasanian era. The time of this transfer is perhaps to be found from corroborative material.

Situated on the north-eastern outskirts of Damghan are the ruins of what is described as a small Sasanian palace. This structure, excavated by Schmidt in the early 1930's,¹⁰⁰ has been assigned by Wachsmuth to the end of the 6th century A.D.¹⁰¹ This dating was based on a comparison of stucco ornamentation found at the site with a quantity of stucco work recovered by the German excavations at the late Sasanian palace of Tāq-i Kisrā at Ctesiphon. But who built the Damghan structure?

The palace consists of official and domestic quarters, containing in all a total of some 21 mostly small rooms, within an area of approximately 50 × 50 m. This was certainly not a residence of the later Sasanian kings, for the structure is of such modest proportions that it could hardly have held the royal retinue. The small size of the palace suggests rather the seat of an important local personage such as the governor of the district. The dominant figure in Kōmish and Khurāsān during the late Sasanian period was Bistam of the house of Aspahbadh-Pahlav.¹⁰² This family was to suffer a somewhat turbulent history.

Sebeos states that Hormizd IV (A.D. 579–590) removed all the governors and ancestral dynasties from control in Persia, and that this king killed the Asparapet (Aspahbadh) of Pahlav.¹⁰³ Hormizd IV was overthrown by his son Khusro II (A.D. 590–628) and later killed by the latter's maternal uncles Vistahm (Bistam) and Vindoe.¹⁰⁴ After the defeat of the usurper Bahram Chobin in A.D. 591, Khusro appointed his uncle Bistam governor in Gurgan, Kōmish, and Khurāsān. Bistam took up residence in Kōmish. Shortly thereafter, Khusro, in an apparent attempt to avenge his father's murder, had Vindoe put to death. Bistam, meanwhile, declared himself king in the territory under his control.¹⁰⁵

Surviving coins issued by Bistam's rebel régime date from the years of reign 2 to 6 or 10.¹⁰⁶ It is thus evident that Khusro was unable to regain control of these northern provinces for some ten years.

The length of Bistam's separatist rule would suggest that he may have been the builder of the small palace at Damghan. He was known to have resided in Kōmish. As an independent ruler he would certainly have wanted, and no doubt required, a larger and more

¹⁰⁰ For a description of this structure see E. Schmidt, *Excavations at Tepe Hissar* . . . , 327–31.

¹⁰¹ F. Wachsmuth, *Die Ausgrabungen der zweiten Ktesiphon-Expedition*, Islamische Abteilung, Staatliche Museen, Berlin, 1933, 24. Some scholars suggest an earlier sixth-century date for the Tāq-i Kisrā. The evidence of historical records, unfortunately, is inconclusive (see O. Kurz, "The date of Tāq i Kisrā", *JRAS*, 1941, 37–41; A. Bruno, "The preservation and restoration of Tāq-Kisrā", *Mesopotamia*, I, 1966, 89–93). Numerous stucco decorative devices used by the late Sasanians were developments of much older Greek and Roman forms. Thus the further stylistic adaption of these traditional motifs between the mid and late 6th century would probably not have been considerable. This would seem especially true in the ornamentation of provincial buildings such as the Damghan structure.

¹⁰² The Aspahbadh-Pahlav line was one of the so-called seven first families of Iran. On this dynasty see A. Christensen, *L'Iran sous les Sassanides*, Copenhagen, 1944, 103–5.

¹⁰³ Sebeos, *Histoire d'Héraclius*, Paris, 1904, 118.

¹⁰⁴ Ib. Sebeos states that Vindoe and Bistam were sons of the Aspahbadh killed by Hormizd IV; thus that king must have murdered his maternal grandfather. Cf. F. Justi, *Iranisches Namenbuch*, Marburg, 1895, 429.

¹⁰⁵ On this sequence of events see Dinawari, *Tarikh al-Akbar at-Tiwal*, ed. Guirgess, Leiden, 1888, 102 ff.

¹⁰⁶ F. Paruck, *Sasanian coins*, Bombay, 1924, 113.

impressive residence than that used by the former vassal governors. The period of his reign (approximately A.D. 692–700, but dated on the coins from the ascension of Khusro in A.D. 690) would correspond closely with the late 6th-century dating given to the Damghan palace by Wachsmuth. Bistam is also the traditional founder of the city of Bustam (medieval Bistam), located north of Shahrud.¹⁰⁷ Thus that he should have built a new palace away from the old site of Kōmish of the Five Towers, in an area that provides a more plentiful water supply (as Damghan does), would be in keeping with both his position and his known practice.

If Bistam did establish his residence at the Damghan palace, then it is probable that a town housing retainers, soldiers, servants, and sundry merchants would have developed in an area adjacent to the royal residence, i.e. at Damghan proper. The founding of such a town during the final decades of the Sasanian epoch would explain how Qūmis/Damghan became the capital of Kōmish before the Arab conquest. Such a late foundation would also explain why Schmidt recovered so little pre-Islamic material at Damghan.

We do not know when the earlier city, Shahrstān-i Kōmish, was founded, although the mention in the *Shahristānīhā* that Yazdagird I (A.D. 399–421) made this place a strong watch-post would suggest at least a refounding at that time.¹⁰⁸ There was certainly a gap between the abandonment of Parthian Hecatompylos/Kōmish and the establishment of Sasanian Kōmish, as is indicated by the statement of Isidore of Charax that (in his day) there were no cities in the district of Comisene. If, as the writer tentatively suggests, Shahr-i Qūmis Areas B and B-1 are, in part, to be identified with Kōmish of the Five Towers, then the site would have continued in occupation, as is evidenced by the Islamic sherds of Area B, until the approximate period of the Mongol invasion of Iran. The survival of a part of the older town would explain why Qūmis and Damghan are mentioned as separate places in the *Tarikh-i Tabaristān*, and why the Bal'ami version of Ṭabarī (A.D. 963) mentions an army as having rallied at Qūmis and at Damghan.¹⁰⁹ Qūmis, in this case, would refer to the former capital, and Damghan to the new capital. But that Damghan was also called Qūmis is clearly shown by Yakūbī and by the measured itineraries of the early Islamic geographers Ibn Khurdādhbih (A.D. 864) and Kudāmāh (A.D. 880).¹¹⁰ This sometimes calling two separate places by the same name, that of the district in which they were located, must have caused considerable confusion. The practice of giving Damghan the alternative name of Qūmis, however, seems to have died out by the end of the 10th century, though, as we have shown, the separate ruin-site of Shahr-i Qūmis retains this name even today.¹¹¹

It should, perhaps, be mentioned at this point that a recent and detailed study by the

¹⁰⁷ The alleged tomb of Bustam Mirza (Prince Bustam) is still venerated at Bustam, though he was later canonized as a Moslem saint. Cf. Mordmann, "Hekatompylos", 517–8.

¹⁰⁸ Marquart, *A catalogue* . . . , 57, suggests that Yazdagird II (A.D. 439–57), son of Bahram V, who is historically attested to have warred against the Chol (the Hephthalites), founded there (in the country of the Chol) a fortified cantonment, Shahrstān-i Yazdagird. No mint monograms identified as Kōmish have been found on Sasanian coins. This fact would, perhaps, suggest that Sasanian Kōmish, as the above station, was maintained more as a fortified post on the Khurāsān road than as a district capital during the early years after its refounding.

¹⁰⁹ Ibn Isfandiyyar, *Tarikh-i Tabaristān*, tr. Browne, 1905, 14; Ṭabarī (*Bal'ami* version, tr. Zotenberg), III, 491.

¹¹⁰ Ibn Khurdādhbih, *Bibl. Geog. Arab.*, VI, 23; Kudāmāh, *ib.*, 201.

¹¹¹ As in many instances with Middle Persian *k*, especially before a back vowel, the Arabic spelling of Kōmish is with *qāf*, and this orthography has prevailed in modern Persian.

writer of aerial photographs covering all the Damghan plain produced no other likely site for Sasanian Kōmish. Nor have extensive enquiries at Damghan and at Qūsheh resulted in the discovery of such a site. The population of this area knows only of Shahr-i Qūmis. There is also a strong local tradition that Shahr-i Qūmis was the capital of the region before Damghan.

The older town of Qūmis does not appear on the itineraries of the early Islamic geographers, but then the Islamic settlement at Shahr-i Qūmis was located nearly two miles (3.2 km.) east of the present Semnan-Damghan road. If this road has remained relatively unchanged since the 10th century, then the present wayside stop of Qūsheh may be identified with the Garmgūy of Istakhri (A.D. 951) and Mukaddasī (A.D. 985).¹¹²

The post-station of Garmgūy was situated two days journey from Semnan and one day before Damghan. Qūsheh lies some 40 miles (34 km.) from Damghan—almost exactly two-thirds of the distance between these two places.

CONCLUSION

This paper is intended as an introduction to the many problems associated with Hecatompylos and with the district of Comisene (Kōmish) in which that city lay. The writer has proposed solutions to some of these questions. The site of Shahr-i Qūmis is submitted to be the ancient Hecatompylos. Source-material and site-evidence have been presented on other points which can only be completely resolved by excavation.

¹¹² Istakhri, *Bibl. Geog. Arab.*, I, 215–16; Mukaddasī, *ib.*, III, 371–2.